

# SALVANET

A Publication of Christians for Peace in El Salvador, CRISPAZ

## A Space of Our Own: Women Coming Together in San Vicente



Photo: Kelly Creedon

Under the shade of a *ceiba* tree, a team of four women pull together some borrowed plastic chairs to plan the next meeting of the women's group in the community of San Francisco in the department of San Vicente. Aracely, Paty, and Doris are the group's elected leadership team; the fourth woman is "Juanita," or Mary Jane Mitchell, a CRISPAZ volunteer who has been living and working for the past two years in San Francisco. The leadership team was elected to give direction to the group and plan meetings, along with Mary Jane, who encourages the women, helps them get organized, and works with them to give shape to their goals and to find the resources they need to fulfill them.

Under the *ceiba* seems as good a meeting place as any for the moment; the group continually faces the challenge of finding available meeting spaces, initially coming together in the church and later moving from one house to another within the community. Homes, and land, are at a premium in this village that suffered devastating damages during the 2001 earthquakes. The majority of homes in the community were shaken to the ground, leaving families homeless and traumatized. It was in the aftermath of the quake that the women's group was born. "We were so depressed

and sad," remembers Aracely. There was no *alegría* (joy), she says. With Mary Jane's help, the women began coming together in the church and recounting their stories of the earthquake. "As each person would tell their story, they would start crying, like they were reliving it," says Aracely. "By the time they were done, the rest of us couldn't speak because we were crying with them."

Aracely admits that initially women came to the group hoping it was the beginning of a project where they might be able to get a new house. Once they realized that the group was not about housing projects but rather about *convivencia*, bringing women together to share their experiences and hopes, attendance lagged. But more than a year later, the group has planted roots and defined itself. Attendance can be anywhere between 10 to 25 women, with ages ranging from 15 to 70. "It's a space for us women to get away from the house, forget about things for a while, be together and sing and laugh," says Doris.

Group meetings usually focus on a theme, from personal development to women's roles in the community. The group has received help from the *Equipo Maíz* popular education team who have visited the community on several occasions to give workshops on self-esteem, sexuality, and, most recently, natural medicine. Paty says the meetings have helped the women learn to express themselves and see themselves as actors within the structure of the community.

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Focus on  
Women's  
Stories

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In one meeting, the women read the story of Mencha, a girl who wanted to be the president of the country but her family did not have enough money for her to go to school. With a lot of hard work and determination, Mencha grew up and became the president of the community's board of directors. Immediately the men began talking badly about her and she wanted to quit, but the other women encouraged her to stay. "We saw a little bit of ourselves reflected in the story of Mencha," says Paty. "People try to tell you what you can and can't do, but you have to keep on trying. That's why we decided to call the group 'Las Menchas.'"



Some members of Las Menchas pose after a meeting.

Photo: Kelly Creedon

The decision to elect leaders came as the group took shape and began looking towards the future. A quick and undisputed vote put Paty, Doris, and Aracely at the front of the group, along with Paty's sister, Yolanda, who has since withdrawn as a group leader. The women were a bit overwhelmed at taking on their first leadership roles. "It feels good to know people trust in you, but it's a lot of responsibility; it makes

you want to work hard and to not let the others down," says Doris.

Foremost among the dreams of the group is the desire to begin a cooperative that would give them the opportunity to work and earn money for their families. The group has begun visiting women's

cooperatives in other parts of the country to learn from these women's experiences and help them envision their own future project.

For now the group is focused on finding a meeting place, a space of their own to give them a sense of stability and permanence. In a place where resources are scarce and some families are still waiting to rebuild homes almost three years after the earthquakes, the goal of finding a piece of land and building a women's group center will take some time. But the *Menchas* feel confident that having their own place to stand is the next step to deepening their roots and allowing their dreams to blossom.✚

— K.C.

### *From the Editor*

Greetings once again from San Salvador! It is with much *alegría* that we bring you this edition of *Salvanet* featuring the voices of women. Women in El Salvador, and in many parts of the world, are often denied the right to be actors in their own destiny; they are denied the right to education, health, and work opportunities that can allow them to reach their personal goals and protect and nurture their families. We have brought together here the stories of women involved in youth violence, struggling to live in peace; women in rural communities, learning to express themselves; women in the labor market, fighting to have their rights respected; and women from all backgrounds who are refusing to be victims of the economic and social violence. As we at CRISPAZ work alongside these women, we are inspired to keep struggling to create a more just world where everyone's voices are heard. In this edition we have chosen to lift up their voices; we ask you to listen carefully so that we may all join in their song.

*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. As an organization, we are non-partisan and committed to non-violence.*



Comments or questions regarding *Salvanet* can be sent to: [salvanet@navegante.com.sv](mailto:salvanet@navegante.com.sv)

According to a 2002 report from the United Nations Development Program, El Salvador occupies the 105 place out of 175 countries evaluated on the human development factors of life expectancy, per capita income, and education. However, if the country were divided by gender, the men of El Salvador would be in position 87, while the women would be in position 108, 21 places below.



### Labor Market

The **average salary** for women is **30% lower** than the average salary for men.

More than half of those working in the informal sector of the labor market are women. Workers in this sector are **more vulnerable** because most do not receive work benefits established by the law.

### Heads of Families:

97% of activities and responsibilities in the home are carried out by women.

Approximately 30% of all Salvadoran households are headed by **single mothers**.

### Domestic violence:

92% of reports of domestic violence are filed by women. In the year 2000, 4,672 women and 1,938 girls were **victims of domestic violence**.

### Political Participation:

In El Salvador, only 8% of mayors, 11.31% of congresspeople, and 16% of judges are **women**.

### Adult Illiteracy rate:

Total: 18.3%

Women: 20.8%

Men: 15.3%

Women in urban areas: 13.8%

Men in urban areas: 7.6%

Women in rural areas: 33.2%

Men in rural areas: 27.1%

Statistics from the United Nations Development Program, [www.pnud.org.sv](http://www.pnud.org.sv)

## In memory of the four churchwomen killed December 2, 1980

The following excerpts were taken from reflections offered at the twentieth anniversary commemoration of the deaths of Maura Clarke, Ita Ford, Jean Donovan, and Dorothy Kazel. The women were raped and killed by members of the Salvadoran army in 1980. For more information on these martyrs and to read the reflections in their entirety, visit the website of the Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico, [www.rtfcam.org](http://www.rtfcam.org).

“Why celebrate them? Because they are absolutely necessary for this world to change. This world, maybe the word is too strong, I have called it criminal, but this world is asleep. It has to be shaken up, not only challenged. We need realities that challenge us — but seriously — that don’t let us sleep in peace, at least once in a while. And we also need people who challenge us because life has been trivialized.

Now, who are the people who can do that? Well, in my opinion, the martyrs. No amount of new canon law, no amount of Roman catechism, no amount of liberation theology, no amount of that will be able to shake us up as martyrs do...”

— Jon Sobrino



“What does it mean to ‘live in memory of Jesus?’ That question was incorporated into me 20 years ago in a new way through the death of the women and the suffering of the people of El Salvador.

The totality of the invitation has continued to our own day. But so has the totality of the response. There are people today who live in memory of Jesus so totally that they give themselves totally to life without the fear of death. That’s the invitation. That’s why we remember these women and in remembering Maura, Ita, Dorothy, and Jean, we remember the people of El Salvador, we remember the peoples around the world who have lived and died in memory of Jesus.”

— Melinda Roper, MM

## Leaving the Gang: A Young Woman Beats the Odds

“If I have one hope for my children, it would be that they never get involved in a gang,” says Rosario. She is more than familiar with the damage and scars caused by youth violence and gang involvement. At 23, Rosario de Tránsito Hernández is the mother of three, expecting her fourth, and is recently separated from her husband of two years who is a member of the *Mara Salvatrucha*, or MS 13<sup>th</sup> Street gang. Rosario, who became involved in the gang lifestyle at the age of 15, now works painting miniature houses at a workshop run by youth trained through MOJE, a partner of CRISPAZ. MOJE is an organization that works with gang members and former gang members to help them find alternatives to the violent gang lifestyle and opportunities to work and live in peace.

Rosario moved out of her house at 15 because she felt mistreated by her parents. “My mom would hit me a lot, she made me feel like I was worth nothing,” she remembers. Once in the street, she became friends with some of the gang members. For her formal initiation to the 13<sup>th</sup> Street gang, she was beaten by three gang members for a full 13 seconds, a traditional entrance rite. Some girls, she says, rather than being beaten, are obligated to have sex with a given number of gang members in order to join.

In the gang, Rosario found friendship and a sense of belonging. She became involved in all aspects of gang life, robbing, drinking, smoking marijuana, even fighting rival gang members with knives and guns. “When you’re fighting with your *clica* (subgroup of the gang),” she says, “you feel confident, because you know anyone will defend you. But on your own, you feel afraid all the time because you have to be looking out for the other gang.” The MS 13<sup>th</sup> Street and the 18<sup>th</sup> Street gangs are the two largest rival groups in El Salvador, and inter-gang violence often results in severe injuries and death on both sides.

Rosario faced challenges even within the structure of her own *clica*. The leader of her group forced her to be in a sexual relationship with one of the other

Photo: Kelly Creedon



Rosario at work painting miniature wooden houses.

members. The man beat Rosario and tried to control her movements; when she became pregnant, he told her that the baby wasn’t his and tried to kill the child by hitting Rosario’s stomach. When she tried to leave the relationship, the head of the *clica* threatened to kill her and her family.

Rosario was trapped. She felt she couldn’t return to her family

because she was too ashamed of what she had gotten involved in. She remembers one occasion when she tried to visit her family’s house: “My brothers told me to go back to the street, that I had already made my choice and that that was where I belonged. They told me I had already caused my parents too much pain.”

Rosario was finally able to escape the gang, and the abusive relationship, when the head of the *clica* was sent to prison. The group’s structure slowly disintegrated, and while some members joined other *clicas*, Rosario decided to stay away from the gang life. Members of her own gang threatened to kill her for being unloyal to the gang; she received a new wave of threats recently when she decided to enter a process to remove her gang tattoos. But, *gracias a Dios*, thanks to God, she says, none of the threats have been carried out.

Rosario says that when she has the chance to talk to kids involved in the gangs now, she tries to counsel them. “I try to tell them to get out, because the gangs only take you one of two places: you end up in prison or in a coffin.” Of the 30 youth that were active in her *clica*, she says, about five or six are serving prison sentences; the rest are dead.

Rosario has been able to reconcile with her parents, who now help her by taking care of her children while she works. In addition to her work at MOJE, Rosario has a second job painting ornaments and toys at night. Even with both jobs, she never earns enough to give her children everything they need. “Sometimes I worry that when my kids grow up, they’ll be embarrassed of me. I’m afraid they’ll ask me why I got involved in the gang. But I hope that they can learn from my mistakes, so they won’t have to suffer like I have.” ❖

— K.C.

## The Price of Fashion: Exploitation in the Garment Industry

Eighteen years ago, Maria Maura Colorado abandoned her home country of El Salvador looking for a way out of her desperate situation. Her husband, with whom Maura had worked selling fruit, was killed during the civil war, leaving Maura alone with their three young children. Looking for a way to support her family, Maura left the children in the care of her mother and headed to the United States in search of work. As she began her long journey, she had no way of knowing the difficulties she would face in *el norte*.

With no documents, Maura crossed the border into the United States hidden in the trunk of a car with another woman and her son. She headed for Los Angeles. With the help of her brother-in-law, Maura searched for work for a month and found that the garment industry was the easiest field to enter. After paying eighty dollars for a two-week course in single- and double-needle stitch, she found work in a clothing factory.

In the garment industry, Maura has worked at various factories, constantly struggling to find dignified working conditions and earn what she deserves. Factory after factory, she has faced a series of degrading circumstances, including dirty workplaces with poor lighting, filthy bathrooms usually with no toilet paper or soap, no clean drinking water, and often with rats and cockroaches. She remembers that after she was injured when a needle went through her finger, the factory manager told her to return to work and refused to take her to the doctor for a job-related injury. Asking factory bosses for a cleaner workplace only draws laughs; "Sometimes they treat us like we're animals, like we're not even human beings."

The search for a just wage has been another on-going challenge for Maura. In most cases, garment factory workers are paid by the number of pieces sewn, rather than by the hour. Maura reports that at one point the piece rate was so low that she was earning between three and four dollars per hour when the minimum

wage in California is \$6.75. She recounts the experience of asking one of her employers for a higher piece rate: "He told me I was ridiculous for asking for more money, and that I was fired. He then spit at me. I felt so humiliated."



Maura holding a shirt that she sewed for the Forever 21 brand in a garment factory.

Photo courtesy of Garment Workers' Center

Over a period of several years, Maura worked in several different factories that produced clothing for the Forever 21 brand. She was paid 22¢ to sew an entire blouse, while the retail price of the same blouse was \$14.99 in a Forever 21 store. The factory owner told Maura there was no more work for her after she complained to him that he was not paying her for all the pieces that she sewed.

Through the Garment Worker Center in downtown Los Angeles, Maura was finally able to learn about her rights and win some wage justice. In May of 2001, the Center helped her file a claim against the employer where she had worked for nearly two years—and the manufacturers

that contracted with him—because she was only paid per piece during her employment and not guaranteed minimum wage and overtime. Through the claim, she was able to recover over \$15,000 in lost wages; the money allowed her to return to El Salvador in 2002 for the first time in almost 18 years to see her family.

Maura served on the Board of Directors at the Garment Worker Center from September 2001 to September 2002, stepping down, she says, "to give other workers a chance to develop their leadership." She continues to be active in the center, welcoming new members and encouraging them to become involved in the Center's activities. "I am motivated because I'm still in the garment industry and will remain to be," she says. "I need to stay in the fight because there are so many people working in the industry who don't know their rights or are afraid because they are undocumented." ❖

— K.C.

Special thanks to Maria Maura Colorado and the Garment Worker Center for their help with this article. For more information on the Garment Worker Center, visit their website: [www.garmentworkercenter.org](http://www.garmentworkercenter.org).

## Our Future is Not For Sale: Why Women Say NO to Free Trade

The following list is presented with thanks to the Salvadoran women's organization Las Dignas, Women for Dignity and Life. All text and graphics were taken from educational materials provided by Las Dignas and translated and edited by SalvANET.



### 1. Free trade agreements promote the privatization of public goods and services.

Women will have to take on the cost of these services to guarantee the health, education, and nutrition of them and their families, doubling their workload inside and outside of the home.

### 2. Free trade generates female unemployment.

It is a lie that free trade agreements generate work for women. The policy of reduction of the state and the bankruptcy of small and medium-sized businesses due to unfair competition with multi-national corporations causes women to be thrown out of the formal labor market and obligated to work in the informal sector, without any labor protections.



### 3. Free trade agreements create jobs with no respect of labor legislation.

Free trade agreements consolidate a structure of *maquila*-based development that sees women as cheap labor, without guaranteeing dignified work conditions.

### 4. Free trade impedes migration.

Free trade agreements are exclusively interested in the free movement of goods, commodities, and capital and not of people. This does not allow workers to look for jobs in other countries.



## 5. Free Trade destroys local agricultural economies.

The dominance of agro-business production, in which multinational corporations produce food for profit, causes the destruction of small producers. These small producers are the ones who supply internal markets, and most of them are women.



## 6. Free trade promotes destruction of the environment and reduces biodiversity.

Under the rules of free trade, government regulations intended to preserve the environment are not respected if they create obstacles to trade and investment. Corporations have the right to hold governments legally responsible in international courts if the protection of the environment would reduce their earnings.



## 7. Free trade helps to institutionalize social violence and militarization.

To protect the interests of the multinational corporations, governments resort to mechanisms of repression and violence against the population. Those principally affected by social violence are women, as mothers, wives, life partners, daughters.



Increases in Poverty and Inequality



## 8. Free trade produces increases in poverty and inequality.

Free trade agreements allow for the exclusive profit of multinational corporations and the country's economic power groups, increasing the deep pre-existing social and economic inequalities.



## Remembering the Martyrs of the UCA

November 16, 2003, marked the fourteenth anniversary of the massacre of the six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter at the hands of the elite, U.S.-trained Atlacatl Battalion. The deaths of Ignacio Ellacuría, Ignacio Martín-Baro, Segundo Montes, Joaquín López y López, Amando López, Juan Ramón Moreno, Elba Ramos and Celina Ramos are commemorated every year with cultural activities, celebrations of the eucharist and an all-night vigil at the Central American University (UCA) campus that draws thousands of people together to honor the memory of the martyrs. The testimonies below, reprinted from the UCA publication *Carta a Las Iglesias* (Letter to the Churches), were recorded by the UCA radio station, YSUCA, in the communities of Santa Marta, El Zapote, El Rodeo, and San Felipe, in the department of Cabañas.

"The UCA martyrs help me to remember the good things of the past. For example, they gave their lives for us, they shed their blood for us. If they were alive they would continue defending us, they would talk about our problems, they would give us hope, they would bring light to our cause."

— *Francisco López*

"The UCA martyrs help me base my faith in reality. They offered their talents to help us understand our situation. If they were here today they would be denouncing all the injustices that there are in the country. For example, Father Montes spoke of our critical situation living in the refugee camps. And he did it both in the country as well as outside the country. He advised us to organize ourselves in our communities to be able to confront our needs."

— *Lucila Membreño*

"The martyrs of the UCA have made my faith stronger. Their efforts were not in vain. I think that if the UCA martyrs were with us, they would be offering their voice of hope. They would be encouraging us to work for the dreams of the poor that were their own dreams. This was what Father Segundo Montes did when he visited the community of Santa Marta in the first years of the repopulation."

— *Arturo Armando Recinos*

"Their example helps us to maintain our faith, it doesn't allow us to hold back or get discouraged. The UCA martyrs have made us believe in truth, justice, and solidarity. I remember when Father Montes visited us in the Colomoncagua refugee camp, I felt joy because someone from the church took us seriously, was worried about our situation, like in the times of Archbishop Romero."

— *Martín Velis*

Photo: Mary Jane Mitchell



Each year UCA students and other organizations cover the streets of the UCA campus with *alfombras*, or carpets, out of colored sawdust, sand, and salt to honor the memory of the martyrs.

"If they were alive they would continue defending us, they would talk about our problems, they would give us hope, they would bring light to our cause."

—*Francisco López*

“In my faith, they are like a base of support that allows me to continue fighting for just causes so that this country will change someday. If they were alive today, they would be supporting the Salvadoran people. They would be fighting using their ideas for the good of the poor. This is how I define the martyrs: as men and women who die for the cause of the poor.”

— *Estela Gonzalez*

“The testimony of the UCA martyrs keeps alive not only my faith, but the faith of the community. Here in Santa Marta, we remember them with affection and with admiration. When they were alive we felt that Archbishop Romero was present in them. If they were alive today they would be like Archbishop Romero.”

— *Emilia Leiva*

“The UCA martyrs help me reaffirm my faith in the God of the poor. If they were alive they would continue to be very critical of the current reality. I am familiar with the writings of the Jesuit martyrs and they help me in my work with the communities of Cabañas. They especially help me to reaffirm my ideas about the option for the poor and the need to analyze the problems of the country with the truth.”

— *Miguel Arévalo* ❖

*Reprinted from the publication Carta a Las Iglesias (Letter to the Churches). Carta a Las Iglesias is a bimonthly publication of the Archbishop Oscar Romero Pastoral Center, Central American University (UCA), San Salvador. To access UCA publications online, visit the website:*

[www.uca.edu.sv](http://www.uca.edu.sv).

*For subscriptions to the UCA publications, please contact:*

*Distribuidora de Publicaciones, UCA*

*Apartado Postal 01-575*

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## Do you have what it takes to be a CRISPAZ Volunteer?

### Wanted:

- Open Eyes
- Open Ears
- Open Heart
- Open Mind

CRISPAZ is looking for volunteers with enthusiasm, dedication, and good conversational Spanish to work in the following areas:

### High Risk Youth

Volunteers in the youth area work with urban youth in marginalized neighborhoods and within the penal system. In conjunction with Salvadoran youth organizations, they help create alternatives for young people to develop the skills and abilities that will allow them to choose a positive future.

### South North Solidarity

The SNS focus area is looking for a volunteer to help promote links of solidarity between El Salvador and the U.S. Volunteers may help lead delegation trips and research and write news and action alerts about important issues affecting Salvadorans. Individuals with experience in information technology and advanced Spanish are especially encouraged to apply.

### Rural Community Accompaniment

RCA volunteers work with rural marginalized communities as they search for sustainable ways of living. Volunteers work alongside Salvadoran partner organizations and accompany communities in their journey towards change and just relationships.

CRISPAZ volunteers commit to a minimum of 15-months with their placement community. CRISPAZ works with the volunteer to raise funds and provides a monthly living stipend.

For more information, including placement start dates and applications, please contact one of our offices:

U.S. office: [info@crispaz.org](mailto:info@crispaz.org)

El Salvador office:

[cvp-sip@navegante.com.sv](mailto:cvp-sip@navegante.com.sv)

or visit our website:

[www.crispaz.org](http://www.crispaz.org)



# An Invitation to Solidarity: El Salvador Encounter

by Erin Yost

I finally entered the El Rosario church in downtown San Salvador after living here for a year and a half. I had driven and walked by it many times, but never felt moved to enter it. From the outside it looks very uninviting, nothing more than a grey, concrete dome that looks nothing like any church I had ever seen.

When I finally walked through the doors, I was amazed. Natural light enters through stained glass all along the ceiling. The colors of the rainbow illuminate the sanctuary. This was indeed like no church I had ever seen.

At the far side, to the right of the altar are the stations of the cross, depicted in stone and steel sculpture. I got chills looking at Pontius Polite washing his hands, Christ bearing the cross, the soldiers nailing his hands to the wood, Christ crucified. The sculptures are simple, no faces, mostly hands, a crown of thorns. It felt raw, hard and beautiful all at the same time.

In a lot of ways that church is a metaphor for my experience here in El Salvador. The emotions I felt inside the church reflect the feelings that I go through in my work with CRISPAZ. They are the feelings I see reflected in the faces of El Salvador Encounter participants. The stories of Salvadorans open you up to the country's harsh reality while revealing to you the strength of the human spirit. You look around and see how hard people must work to make ends meet, yet at the same time people greet you with heartbreakingly beautiful hospitality and love.

Someone recently asked me how I ended up living here; I told him that I felt called to do solidarity work in Central America. The question that followed was, "Why El Salvador?"

The links between the US and El Salvador are so strong. There are between one and two million Salvadorans living in the United States, an impressive number when you consider that the population of El Salvador is only six million. When I lived in Washington, DC, I worked and lived in a Salvadoran neighborhood. They were my friends, my co-workers and my neighbors. I knew people from the U.S. who

had lived and worked in El Salvador during the civil war and the years that followed. I read about massacres of civilians committed by Salvadoran soldiers trained in the U.S. I felt connected to El Salvador even though I had never visited.

I feel that my work with the CRISPAZ delegation program is one important way that I can stand in solidarity with

Salvadorans. My experiences traveling in developing countries have transformed me in many ways, and I believe the delegations we host are transformative for those who participate. Coming to El Salvador gives people the chance to step out of their own reality; they visit with communities and organizations and reflect on what they hear. I believe that once this happens, people begin to examine their own reality more critically and begin to question economic disparity and the role of their government in the international arena.

Considering that the one fifth of the global population living in the highest-income countries accounts for 86 percent of private consumption expenditures and that the poorest fifth account for a little over one percent, I feel that as a citizen of the United States it is important to reflect on how my lifestyle affects people living in other countries and what I can do to be in solidarity. It is difficult to realize that, for most of my life, I have been ignorant about the injustices that other people living both outside and inside of my country endure.

**11 years after the war has ended,  
why does solidarity with the  
Salvadoran people continue to be  
so important? Why should North  
Americans come to El Salvador?**

**For me, the answer is easy:  
because Salvadorans are still  
asking us to accompany them.**

But knowing about how my country has contributed to oppression and injustice also allows me to feel empowered. There is liberation in knowing that as a consumer I have influence over making sure that justice is done in garment factories. There is liberation in knowing that as a citizen of the United States, I can meet with my government representatives and influence policy makers.

With that feeling of liberation comes responsibility. Now that I know, I must act. Many who come to El Salvador and witness the strength of its people leave with a complicated mixture of overwhelming emotions. They may feel inspired to act and at the same time confused and burdened by the responsibility of witnessing poverty. Standing in solidarity with the Salvadoran people may mean a change in lifestyle.

Struggling with those feelings is a normal and honest response. We must be honest with ourselves about what form that solidarity will take in our lives. Will I give away most of my material possessions? Will I make a career change? Will I do something radical? Some people might make those choices, but those are not the only ways to be in solidarity. Committing ourselves to sharing our experience with others and helping change attitudes by engaging people in critical conversations are some great ways we can advocate for Salvadorans.



International solidarity and accompaniment saved lives during the civil war of the 1980s. But 11 years after the war has ended, why does solidarity with the Salvadoran people continue to be so important? Why should North Americans come to El Salvador? For me, the answer is easy: because Salvadorans are still asking us to accompany them. They are asking us to help their voices be heard in trade agreement negotiations. They are asking us to witness as the government attempts to lower crime rates by criminalizing youth instead of addressing economic injustice and inequality. They are asking us to observe elections to reduce the risk of fraud. They are asking us to look at our country's foreign policy with a critical eye and engage in the democratic process by meeting with our congressional representatives.

The first step in building solidarity is coming to El Salvador. It is important for Salvadorans to share their hopes for the future as well as their past struggles with people from the United States because our lives are so closely interwoven. I invite you to come, listen, and share with Salvadorans. I invite you to open yourself to those raw emotions, to see the harsh reality of poverty and to experience the beauty for yourself. I invite you to take those first steps towards a deeper understanding of the Salvadoran reality and what solidarity means.✚

*Erin Yost is the coordinator of the El Salvador Encounter program. Erin has been living in El Salvador and working with CRISPAZ since May of 2002. She is originally from Mayfield, New York.*



**CRISPAZ has four focus areas:**

- † Economics for People (EPP)
- † Rural Community Accompaniment
- † South North Solidarity (SNS)
- † High-Risk Youth

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Kelly Creedon, Editor

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- Kelly Creedon, CINES Coordinator
- Elizabeth Hernández, ES Office Administrator
- Tara Mathur, EPP Coordinator
- John Moynihan, Interim EPP Coordinator
- Christopher Ney, US Coordinator
- Eduardo Perdomo, Reception
- Jeanne Rikkens, ES Coordinator
- Erin Yost, ESE Coordinator

**CRISPAZ Volunteers:**

- Cory Henrickson, Anna Hoekstra, Mary Jane Mitchell, Brigid Scott

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

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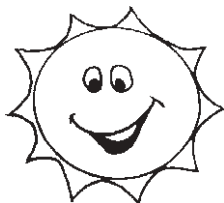
**CRISPAZ**

122 Dewitt Drive  
Boston, MA 02120  
617-445-5115  
info@crispaz.org

**CRISPAZ**

Apartado Postal 2944  
Centro de Gobierno  
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outside, but summer  
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the corner...



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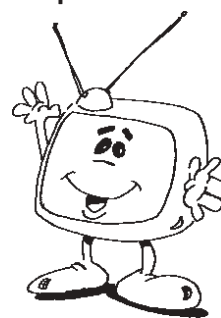
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## 20 years walking with the people of El Salvador...

Since 1984, CRISPAZ has been walking with the people of El Salvador. As we reach our 20th anniversary year in 2004, we are excited to celebrate the journey with the thousands of you that have been there alongside us. We invite you to be part of as we plan events and activities to commemorate twenty years of accompaniment and look with hope on the road that lies ahead.

**Stay tuned for  
more information  
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