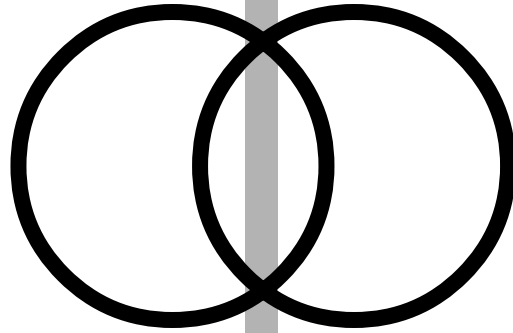


San Jose

October 1998

No. 8



Sister Parish Relationship

Financial Gifts Help Rebuild Communities Devastated by Civil War

Obdulio, Silvio, Augustina, Ernesto, Cristina... These are just a few of the people gathered at the Cathedral Church in Chelate on a Monday morning in July for a meeting of the San Jose Pastoral Council. A few left home as early as 4:00 a.m., walking the wet, hilly roads to reach the city in time for the meeting.

Today, the meeting focuses largely on the Sister Parish, since Kathy Sterling and Rosanne Michaels, visitors from St. Francis of Assisi, are here. At other times, discussion centers on other issues of the communities represented here.

Going around the circle, each member talks about his or her own community. Each person expresses sincere gratitude for gifts received as a result of the Sister Parish relationship.... both spiritual and material gifts. They also offer a list of ways in which funds are being spent:

- Maintenance of a vehicle for the priest, who must travel significant distances along unpaved, mountainous roads to reach the people of the parish, who live in thirty small villages. The four-wheel drive vehicle also serves as a makeshift ambulance.
- Formation of lay workers, including education materials and transportation of participants to a central location.
- Scholarship program used to send youth to high schools, or higher education programs. Currently, four students are going to school as a result of these scholarships.
- Purchase of land for an elementary school in the Sister Parish community of Montanita.
- Housing for those whose houses were destroyed during the war. Each small, cinder block house costs

\$500 to build.

- Repair of war-torn community church buildings.
- A Saturday morning adults religious education program.
- Help with emergency medical and burial expenses.

The financial gifts are important. It is clear that they provide new life for the small communities so devastated by war.... "You are witnesses of how valuable this is to us," someone says to Kathy and Rosanne.

It is so important, too, that our gifts are given without condition, so that the people of San Jose parish are making decisions about how to spend funds, and are doing the work that needs to be done. Someone says to the visitors, "We now have a project, a plan, a good experience to help us in the future."

Mostly, though, what matters to this small gathering of San Jose parishioners is that "someone in the States is praying for us. Someone in the United States is thinking about us."

QUARTERLY COLLECTION



Your generous contributions and prayers for our sister parish San José on October 24th will make it possible for the people to continue the building of their lives and the Kingdom of God in El Salvador.

Popular Education:

An Alternative to Traditional Learning



Padre Wilibaldo, new pastor of our sister parish San Jose, sees education as a top priority, especially for children. The population of San Jose Parish, as in most rural communities of El Salvador, is comprised mostly, if not entirely, of campesinos (peasant, countryman, farmer). Many can neither read or write.

In the 1970s in El Salvador literacy programs were set up, and became popular, in which the students became active participants in their own learning processes. They learned to read and write through discussions and analysis of the basic problems which they themselves were experiencing, such as lack of access to agricultural land and other resources. As the causes of their problems became more clear, they discussed ways in which collective action could be taken to change their situations. This learning process is called "popular education" contrasted with traditional education which views teachers as authority figures and experts, the holders of information. Students are treated as "empty vessels" who passively receive knowledge until they are "filled". Typically, the teacher stands in front of the classroom and dictates or writes facts on the blackboard as the students, sitting anonymously in rows, meticulously copy what is written. Later, they are tested on their ability to memorize what their teacher considers important and those who pass take their place in society. The status quo has not been changed. Popular education, on the other hand, believes that education should not merely serve those who currently hold power in society, but rather can and should serve the interests of the poor and oppressed.

Influenced by liberation theology and the Preferential Option for the Poor, Catholic priests convened Bible study groups in the countryside. For the first time, campesinos began to reflect on the Bible and analyze its relevance to their own lives and the abject poverty in which they were living. Some began to question the belief that their poverty was attributable to God's will. Instead, they came to view the horrendous conditions in which they lived as a direct result of the huge fortunes amassed by a small segment of the population, and the ability of the oligarchy to repress all those who struggled to change the unfair distribution of resources.

The campesinos returned from the refugee camps and repopulated the land in 1986 to try to rebuild their lives.

Much has changed since the war ended. The plight of the men with families was bad, but even worse, many women have been widowed by the civil war and now struggle to find a means to generate income to support and raise their families. These women are now being organized to form guilds or cooperatives for communal income generation, but few have ever gone to school, and those who did were taken out after two or three years to help at home. So, they decided that educating themselves and their communities was an integral element of the current popular struggle for self-determination and human rights. Through "popular education" they will learn reading, writing, and enough accounting to successfully run their cooperatives, determine the price at which they must sell their product to pay back their loan and ensure a profit, and maintain accounting and book-keeping records.

Women of our sister parish have joined together to produce and market a variety of Salvadoran crafts. The sale of these articles means self-reliance and hope for these women in their struggle to support their families. We at St. Francis will continue to offer these items for sale at various times of the year. Watch the bulletin and listen to announcements for times and place.



These crafts are created from the hearts and hands of artisans struggling to provide the sorely needed income to support and raise their families.
