

## A New Road for La Ceiba?

The big news in La Ceiba is that new construction has begun on the road that starts from the city of Chalatenango and winds up around the mountain about 80 miles or so. Workers are widening the road, dynamiting the rock cliffs and cutting down lots of trees. It is nice on one hand because our bus rides to Chalate only take about 25 minutes now, since the road is smoothed out so much. It used to look more like a dry river bed than a road. Rumor has it that once the road is finished, a foreign owned company could come in and build a factory or sweat shop up in the mountains and easily transport goods back to the city and out of the country.

### Why would they want to build a factory up in the mountains?

Well, the answer is simple—cheap labor. People up in our community struggle every year planting corn and beans and other produce to make a living. But the steep mountain sides where they plant are eroding and becoming more exhausted each year. So much money is spent on chemical pesticides and fertilizers that the farmers barely break even. If the harvest is good and they are able to produce more than enough corn and beans to feed their families, the market is so flooded here with grains from other countries that they can't get a decent price selling the small surplus. Why do people farm then? Basically, because they have no other form of income unless they move to the city to find a job. And so, many people in La Ceiba and surrounding communities would welcome a job in a factory earning about \$4 a day. Yes, a day.



### What's wrong with that if people are willing to work for it?

Part of us says, nothing. They need income. \$4 isn't much, but it is better than nothing. Right? Well, there are actually many consequences that come with cheap labor. Most of the time these factories only hire young women. Young mothers leave their children at home to be taken care of by other siblings, which means they are often neglected. Also, it has been proven in studies that children actually become more malnourished when their parent goes to work in a sweat-shop. The mother doesn't have time to make tortillas, or cook beans or rice every day, so she brings her children a bottle of Coke and a couple of bags of chips when she gets off work. These "treats" become a substitute for nourishing foods. One would think that the standard of living should go up for these families with a new source of income, but ironically in many cases it is actually lowered. And that's not to mention the way many workers are treated in these factories, i.e. mandatory overtime, poor working conditions, sexual harassment, etc. In most cases they can forget about unions. If workers are suspected of those kinds of activities they are fired; there are 100 people in line waiting to take a job. Free trade has consequences for people here.

For us in the States it means affordable merchandise, which is good; that's what we want. And for people in El Salvador it means jobs, and that's what the people want... but there are consequences.

*Jon and I are beginning our final year in El Salvador. We have grown very fond of our neighbors in La Ceiba. They really have welcomed us into their lives with open arms. It will be difficult to say good-bye.*

*We look forward to your two week visit in August. You are in our thoughts and prayers daily.*

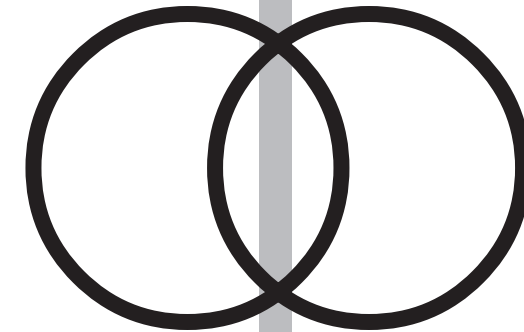
Peace,

**Crystal and Jon Shellenberger**

# San Jose

July 2002

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## Sister Parish Relationship Vamos a El Salvador

**In August this summer a delegation from St. Francis will visit our Sister Parish, San Jose Ojos De Agua. It takes a special commitment to visit our Sister Parish. First, you have to make the time—two weeks is a lot of precious vacation time. Next, you have to make yourself ready to experience living conditions that you are not used to and a language with which you may not be too familiar. Finally, you have to buy your own ticket!**

**That's all we ask of our delegation—give up your vacation, comfort and money. BUT ASK ANYONE WHO HAS BEEN THERE - IT IS WORTH THE PRICE!!**

Margaret Eley, Laurie Fleehtart and Rick Fleehtart are our parishioners who will make the trip.

Margaret and her husband Harold have been active with the sister parish committee since we started nearly seven years ago. Last summer they welcomed the visiting delegation from El Salvador and hosted them in their home. Margaret said, "I was so impressed with the deep spirituality of Tina and Silvio that I

decided to visit them in their home. It was a spiritual awakening for me—they are such genuine people."

Laurie and Rick have participated

*continued inside*



Laurie and Rick Fleehtart and Margaret Eley

in outreaches with St. Francis' migrant worker project, and they have been enriched by being with families and children of different cultures. Rick thinks it is "cool" that he and Laurie are making this trip together. Tina also stayed with them last summer and she promised to make her home ready for their visit. They were worried about the language difficulties but saw how easily they were able to communicate while our friends from El Salvador were here.

Both the Eleys and the Fleehtarts are long time members of St. Francis Parish and are wonderful representatives that will help nurture the relationship. The delegation leaves August 8th and returns August 19th. Keep them in your prayers.

## WANTED: CRAFTS COMMITTEE CHAIR

For several years now, Betty and Bill Stadler have generously volunteered to "chair" the selling of crafts that come from our Sister Parish. They are "retiring" from this effort, and we now seek someone to take over this ministry. Basically, this is what is involved: ❶ Put craft items on display for sales after the weekend Masses about four times during the year. (Currently, the inventory of craft items is easily stored in three 16x13x13" boxes.) ❷ Sell craft items at the annual St. Francis Christmas crafts fair. ❸ Order items to sell from a catalog provided by our friends in El Salvador. Whoever chairs this committee can solicit friends to sell at some of the Masses and share the selling times during the crafts fair. If you feel that this is an area where you can share your time and talent, please call Jack Michaels at (206) 242-6972.

*Hello brothers and sisters of St. Francis of Assisi parish in Seattle,*

*A friendly greeting to you, pastors of the parish and to all stewards of the St. Francis community. I hope that your pastoral work is bearing much fruit in the building of the Kingdom.*

*The purpose of this letter is to greet you all and, at the same time, introduce myself: I am Father Manuel de Jesús Alas Casco. On March 16, Monsignor Eduardo Alas Alvaro entrusted me with the pastorship of the parish of San José Ojos de Agua.*

*I want to thank you all for your friendship and economic support. We are deeply grateful to you. We hope that you continue to support this relationship of mutual sharing.*

*We in the parish pray for you all, and for peace, the sick, the elderly, youth and children, and all church leaders.*

*May the Lord and Holy Mary bless you.*

*Hasta Luego,*

**Padre Manuel de Jesús Alas Casco**



# AMIGOS VIEJOS AMIGOS VIEJOS AMIGOS VIEJOS AMIGOS NUEVOS AMIGOS NUEVOS AMIGOS NUEVOS



By Amy McManamon

## OLD FRIENDS, NEW FRIENDS Growing Relationships Between Sister Parishes

My second visit to the sister parish last spring felt like a homecoming. I was greeted by familiar faces and hugs from the friends I love. I made pupusas with my friend Tina, and read to her daughter. In El Zapotal, I sang with the music group at church one evening. When my mom and sister came at Easter, we had an Easter egg hunt for our friend Julia's children. And the kids in La Ceiba

always paid us a visit at Jon and Crystal's house.

But this trip was also an opportunity to make many new friends. One of the friendliest and most fascinating people I met is the new parish priest, Padre Manuel de Jesús Alas Casco.

During his six years as a priest, Padre Manuel has served at the

cathedral in Chalate and studied in Spain. He began his ministry at San Jose parish in March. Of his new pastoral role, Padre said, "I feel happy because the people are very nice. There's a lot of work, and I like that. I like challenges."

I met Padre Manuel on the day he arrived in Ojos de Agua. He came up to me and started chatting animatedly. I had no idea who he was at first, but I liked him immediately. Amiable, enthusiastic and full of energy, Padre tried out his English skills on me. When he found out I was from the sister parish, he was full of questions about St. Francis and Seattle.

The busy padre invited me to come along as he made his first visits to the other villages in the parish. His first Mass of the day was at 8 a.m. in El Carrizal, an hour's drive away. I thought he was joking. Nope. But the long car rides - we went to four Masses that day - gave us a chance to talk about our parishes and the sister parish relationship.

Padre Manuel is excited about his church's relationship with St. Francis, and he has a bundle of ideas for helping the friendship grow. He wants to increase communication between the two congregations, but would also like to foster an even greater kind of exchange among parishioners. Padre would like to see people from St. Francis visit his parish for a few months or a year, to live, work and share with the people there.

"The economic assistance is important, but the friendship is more important," said Padre. "For me, the important thing is the exchange and experiences" between the two parishes.

Through these more personal exchanges, we at St. Francis can show an interest in, and know something about, the lives of our sisters and brothers in El Salvador. "They feel that they're important, that they are not forgotten," said Padre Manuel.

As our next delegation heads to El Salvador in August, I'll be with

them in spirit. I pray that they, too, form the close friendships that make the sister parish bond stronger.

### A LETTER FROM SILVIO LOPEZ

*Silvio Rodriguez Lopez, who was a member of the last delegation from El Salvador, wrote us as he was finishing his stay in Comer, Georgia, where he studied the English language. He expressed his gratitude to the priests and parishioners of St. Francis for helping to make it possible for him to spend four months at the English language school. He feels that he has learned a great deal from the experience and is looking forward to the visit of our St. Francis delegation in August so that he will have the opportunity of "practicing" his English on them. He wishes us peace and sends his love.*



## A BIG THANK

*You* to the members of Jennifer Geffner's third

grade class at St. Francis School for collecting \$67.18 for our Sister Parish!

Check out our Sister Parish web site at [http://stfrancis.hkhosting.com/Sister\\_Parish.htm](http://stfrancis.hkhosting.com/Sister_Parish.htm)