

Mission Connections

Volume #68

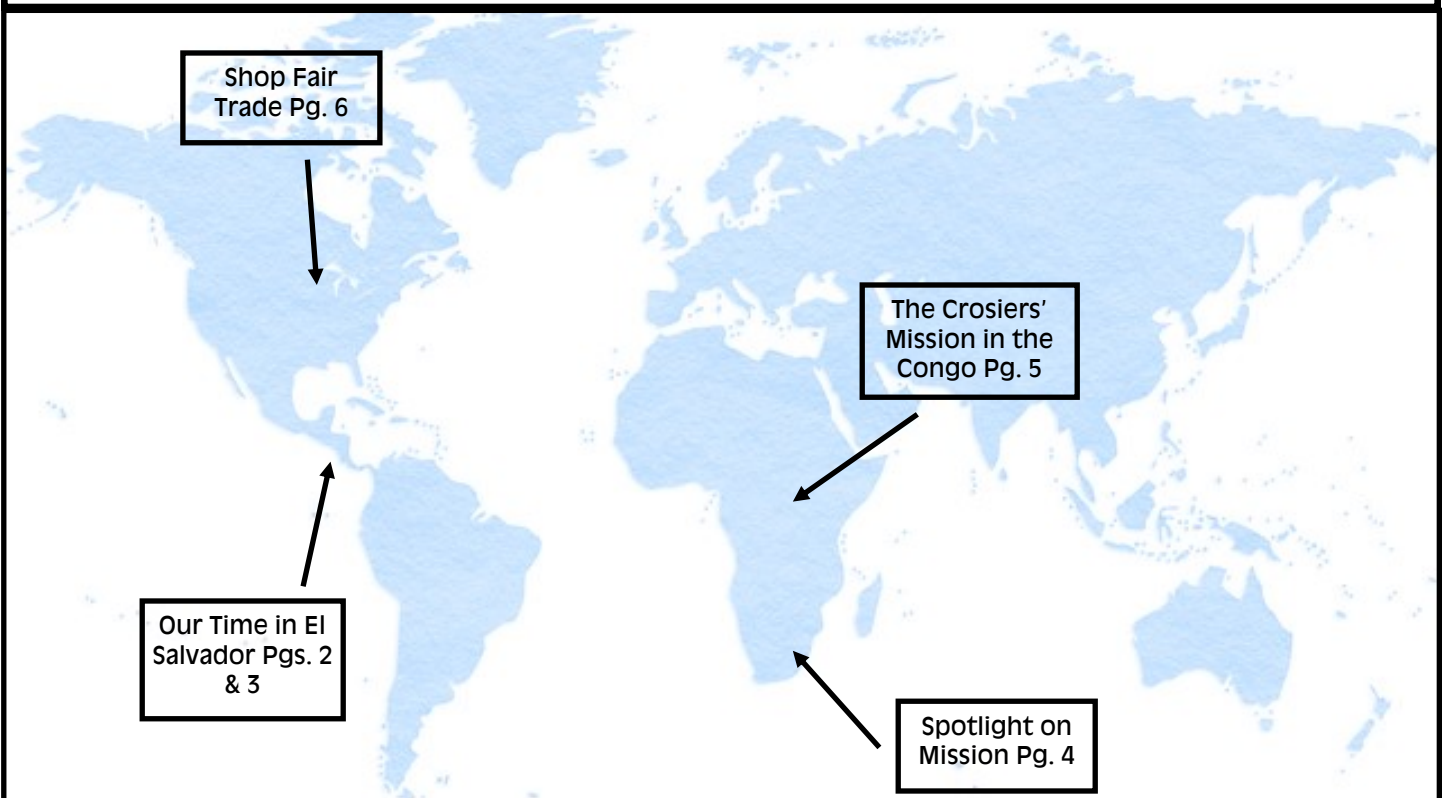
Spring 2022



Prayer

We see you, God,
In the barrios and the breadlines of our world.
Open our hearts to encounter you in love there.
Fill us with a desire to be near you, broken but whole, illiterate but wise beyond measure.
Shape us, mold us, guide us, lead us,
To be at your side and theirs.

From *Oscar Romero and Dorothy Day: Walking with the Poor* by Marie Adele Dennis



From Whom and Where in the World do our stories come from?

Our Time in El Salvador

In March of this year, Elizabeth and Teresa traveled with Maryknoll to walk in the footsteps of the martyrs of El Salvador. We spent a week, mostly in San Salvador and the surrounding area. We were able to listen to the personal stories of the people of El Salvador and visit holy sights where so many lost their lives before, during, and after the years of civil war that ended in 1992. It was a very emotional and powerful trip, and we are excited to be able to share our experience. Resources and suggestions of how to learn more about El Salvador can be found in a purple box on page 6.

Holy Places, Holy People and Holy Ground

Elizabeth Neville Brown

As missionaries, we are all called to seek Christ through opportunities for encountering others throughout the world, throughout our lifetime. With humbleness, we need to be with others physically as well as spiritually, to love all people unconditionally and to build deep and bonding relationships with everyone we encounter.

A little more than a month ago I had the opportunity to journey to El Salvador with the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers to 'Walk in the Footsteps of the Martyrs of El Salvador'. Few places have moved me as deeply as the holy places, holy people and holy ground we encountered while in El Salvador. I will admit I had already learned so much over the years about the horrors that nearly a whole country of people had witnessed, lived through, and even died for, but this lived immersion experience was going to help me in some small way to better understand what thousands of our brothers and sisters faced in a world too often forgotten. It was a privilege to come to a Church of martyrs and witness people with such a strong and committed faith despite their deep wounds.

In his final homily in the chapel of Divine Providence shortly before he was killed, Archbishop Romero said: "One must not love oneself so much as to avoid getting involved in the risks of life that history demands of us.... Those who try to fend off the danger will lose their lives, while those who out of love for Christ give themselves to the service of others will live, like the grain of wheat that dies, allowing itself to be sacrificed in the earth and destroyed. Only by undoing itself does it produce the harvest... This is the hope that inspires us Christians. We know that every effort to better society, especially when injustice and sin are so ingrained, is an effort



Memorial on the side of the road where Fr. Rutillo Grande, Nelson Lemus and Manuel Solorzano were killed.

that God blesses, that God wants, that God demands of us... Let us all do what we can."

We should not forget that the people of El Salvador are our neighbors, our loved ones and our honored guests with a place at our table. They all have names- Archbishop Oscar Romero; Srs. Ita Ford; Maura Clarke; Dorothy Kazel; lay missionary Jean Donovan; Fr. Rutillo Grande; Julia Ramos and her daughter Celina Ramos; Jesuit Frs. Ignacio Ellacuria, Ignacio Martin-Baro, Joaquin Lopez y Lopez, Amando Lopez, Juan Ramon Moreno and Segundo Montes; Nelson Lemus; Manuel Solorzano; Silvia Marroquin;- we need to see with new eyes the reality in which they lived and continue to live to this present day.



Site where the bodies of Srs. Ita, Dorothy, Maura and Lay Missioner, Jean were found.

Since November 2021, we prepared ourselves by reading, researching, and watching the stories and reflections of the horrible atrocities that occurred from the late 1970's until the early 1990's to the people of El Salvador. It is staggering to know that over 70,000 people gave their lives and over half a million people were displaced during these 20-ish years, yearning for peace and justice. In all reality since the early 1900's, the people of El Salvador have faced years of fear and horror but have consciously and with great sacrifice walked the Way of the Cross with unbridled courage and unending hope. The living and the martyrs of El Salvador have asked all of us to join them- 'Walk with us, accompany us on this torturous road; lighten our heavy burdens. Help us find ways to stop the repression, stop the violence, stop the pain, stop the injustice that we have been facing for over 100 years.'

Our first day we visited the site of where Srs. Ita, Dorothy, Maura and Lay Missioner, Jean were executed by the side of the road for their shared faith and love for the people of El Salvador. They were and remain the 'voices for the thousands of voiceless' in the rural communities where they served the people of El Salvador. As we reflected, prayed and sang at their memorial that day, Ita

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Donations for any of the missionaries or mission connections mentioned here may be made in care of the Mission Office.

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Our Time in El Salvador Cont.

Ford's words profoundly struck me and remain in my heart and mind as I continue to live out my Baptismal call as a missionary to the world. "I don't know if it's in spite of: or because of the horror, terror, evil, confusion, lawlessness, but I do know that it is right to be here. To activate our gifts, to use them in this situation, to believe that we are gifted in and for El Salvador now, that the answers to the questions will come when they are needed, to walk in faith one day at a time with the Salvadorans along a road with obstacles, detours and sometimes washouts- this seems to be what it means for us to be in El Salvador."

This is what it means for me to be in El Salvador.

This experience definitely disturbed and disrupted me, causing many moments of feeling truly sorrowful, filled with grief and most uncomfortable. This experience definitely challenged me in my views and ideas of what our countries contributions and our individual contributions were and continue to be in this difficult and painful history of El Salvador. This experience definitely challenged me to re-evaluate, re-think and re-commit to how I live my life and find my place in this world. This experience challenged me to remember to humbly open myself up to encounter and love all my brothers and sisters around the world. These martyrs have all left us a challenge- to look at the truth, to love all not as objects of charity but as human beings deserving dignity, to be a witness to the stories and history of all those that we encountered and to recommit our self and our lives to the work of justice.

God Hears the Cry of the Poor

Teresa Trout

It has now been over a month since we returned from our trip to El Salvador, and still, every time someone asks me about my experience, I find myself lost for words. Yet here I am, pulling out some words to share, as I attempt to give this experience the attention it deserves and look for how I can apply what I learned to my life.

During the seven days we were in El Salvador we visited sites where people were martyred before and during the 12 years of civil war. At every place we stopped I was struck by the pain and suffering that was felt in these places and expressed by those who graciously shared their stories with us. The reality of being among those who have been witnesses to such pain is overwhelming; history is jumping off the pages and daring me to confront it up close. To me, these martyrs had been names and faces from headlines and books. To the people sharing their stories with me, they were neighbors, friends, and family members. Their suffering has been tangible, and even hearing about it is overwhelming. It was in those moments I was reminded of the Bible verse which has been quoted alongside the stories of El Salvador, "That is why my eyes are overflowing with tears. No one can comfort me; no one can give me courage. The enemy has conquered me; my people have nothing left" (Lamentations 1:16). If I could not take the time to sit with that communal grief and pain, then what gave me the right to be treading such holy ground?

El Salvador is a resilient country that is absolutely exhausted

with being resilient. You can see it in the people, the history, the places. While we were there, the country entered an official State of Emergency due to the recent increase in gang-related violence and killings. Although our group was never in any danger, it was a prime example of the instability that El Salvador is continuing to navigate. Issues still linger despite the signing of the pact in 1992 that officially ended the civil war. There is a shared trauma within the people, a distrust of their leaders, and a fear of history repeating itself. Who could blame them? There is so much more work to be done, so much more healing that is needed, and as someone who has now borne witness to this reality, I have an obligation to it.

So now I've returned home, and the people of El Salvador and that obligation have remained on my heart. It's important that I do not turn my observations of struggling people into a museum exhibit to simply stand and gawk at and then turn around and feel more grateful for my own life going forward. Instead, I see



it as my responsibility to use the stories of the people of El Salvador as a driving force towards a better world. In my reflection on this, I have come up with three specific duties that I have. It is my duty to stay up to date on the

conflicts and struggles taking place around the world, and not just listening to what is most reported on, but also seeking out information whenever I can. It is my duty to look around my own community and refuse to turn a blind eye to those who are struggling or are marginalized. I must not only see them, but also look for ways that I contribute to their struggles, and then begin to work for a better world for all. Finally, it is my duty to educate others and encourage them to pay attention as well. To call out injustice when I see it, and endeavor to be like the martyrs of El Salvador, who risked everything for the good of God's people.

In *El Salvador: A Spring Whose Waters Never Run Dry*, a collection of stories from the people of El Salvador during the time of the war, Jon Sobrino, S.J. writes, "My hope is that we will respond to these testimonies by raising our voices with those of the poor, offering them our solidarity when almost all the powers of the world – political, economic, military, cultural and even at times religious – are against them. In this way we will become a little more human and a little more Christian" (Wright, 8). Working in Mission Education provides me with opportunities to raise my voice, and as a Catholic, it's my responsibility to do so in all aspects of my life. It is also my responsibility to encourage others to do the same. We know that God hears the cry of the poor, but do *we* hear it? It's time to listen.



Spotlight on Mission

There are countless mission activities happening all the time both in the St. Cloud Diocese and around the world. All these mission activities are important to the work of celebrating our global Church. In this issue we highlight Fr. Lawrence Otieno, a Mill Hill Missionary from Kenya who is currently serving in South Africa. Fr. Lawrence became connected with our office as a previous altar server of Fr. John Kaiser, MHM.

Easter Hope

Fr. Lawrence Otieno, MHM.

Hope inspires us to trust in the divine providence particularly in cases and situations which seem impossible. It dispels the darkness of fear, discouragement and provides sustenance in times of trials. Hope for the better has carried and sustained us through the tough time of Covid and led us to a joyful celebration of Easter as a community in 2022.

This hope fills us with joy, renews and strengthens our faith in the Risen Lord and inspires us to be its witnesses. This joy sets us on fire to be messengers of hope. Trusting in the divine providence and the Risen Lord who sends and accompanies us in the mission, we reach out to those who are near and far to share Easter hope and invite them to encounter him in their life stories and renew their hopes.

Like in other parts of the world, the Church in South Africa was not spared by the Covid 19 pandemic. South Africa was badly hit than other countries in Africa. Far reaching effects of this pandemic subjected people to a situation of fear, discouragement, pain, death poverty and despair. The elderly are the majority in the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa. They are the backbone of the Church and bread winners of families. Many of them succumbed to Covid and left behind family members in a state of suffering and despair. Besides that families are severely affected by loss of jobs and subjected to poverty. Earning a living and providing food for sustaining the struggling families is a great challenge.

In the face of these challenges bearing witness to hope and the joy of Easter calls for going an extra mile in our missionary call and service. Thanks to the decline of Covid, people can freely move and meet physically. I reach out to the people of God on Sundays and weekdays to strengthen, to sustain their faith and renew their hope through the word of God and the Eucharist. We also gather for mass in small Christian communities every month. Basic Christian Community meetings have also been helpful. They provide opportunities for Christians to meet, to share their experiences and help one another.

I reached out to the poor, the jobless, the orphans and the elderly in their homes to restore their hopes, through listening, encouraging them to trust and hope in the promises of God. There are elderly who are living alone in poor conditions without helpers or relatives. I visit them to check on them, comfort them, offer them some care and get some medicine for them. When they pass on, a Christian community offers them a decent send off as members of the Christian family. Some members of the parish are immigrants. A meeting in each family ends with a prayer and distribution of food. This has



been a grace filled opportunity for extending the compassion and brotherhood of Christ to those in great need.

Witnessing to Easter hope in different ways in the parish has brought joy to the people of God and I. I am witnessing it in the good turn up of Christians for the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday, the joyful celebration of the sacrament of Baptism on Easter Sunday where 11 adults and infants were baptized, active participation of the Christians in the life and mission of the Church, sacrifice and support they offer to one another even at the time of grief. This hope is prompting the Christian community to make the parish a home where members feel accepted, supported, appreciated and given the opportunities to contribute their talents and gifts and take part even in social events in the church as a family.

We are Easter people, mandated by the Risen Lord to go out to be joyful witnesses of Easter hope. We are invited to recognize the presence of the Risen Lord in our lives and find him in the little ways in which he has been offering us the gifts of hope even in the moments of failures. As witnesses we are challenged to recognize and appreciate ways in which God is acting on our behalf and restoring our hope. Particularly through people of goodwill, who love and serve their neighbors, pray for the success of the missionary work around the world, encourage and support us in the mission. It is the Holy Spirit that can move us to go beyond our needs and reach out to others and restore their hope. Besides that, finding of the Covid 19 vaccines, rolling it out in the world, people recovering from this virus the decline of its infections are signs and fulfillment of hope. For me, these are signs of the healing hands of God reaching out to his people at the time of despair and restoring their hopes. Life is turning normal again for the better.

May we be grateful and joyful witnesses of Easter hope, share it with others and help those who have lost it to hope again.



Top picture: Fr. Lawrence on a home visit in the community.
Bottom Picture: Fr. Lawrence performing baptisms.

The Ringing Bell from the Crosiers' Mission in the Congo!

In the Spring 2021 Newsletter there was a story about a new school being built in the Congo. Since then, Fr. Kambale Sambya Zawadi Jean-Marie, OSC has gone back to visit the Congo and provided us with an update on the school! Please contact the St. Cloud Mission Office if you would like to know more about this project or contribute in any way.

Pictures provided by Fr. Zawadi from his trip.

As a Mission Director of the Crosier Fathers and Brothers, I believe that every young person has the potential to do great things. I believe that through Catholic Education, youth are given the tools to explore, learn, invent, and develop.

In January 2022, I had the opportunity to visit the Congo and to supervise our different projects: Hospitals, Listening Center, Schools, University, jail ministry project and our orphanage. Also, I was in the Congo to assess and to make an accounting for our projects. Also, I had the opportunity to provide some formation and training for Crosier confreres so that they can become ever better stewards of the gifts with which people and parishes and organizations entrust to them. My heart is full of joy because of what I have seen in our mission in the Congo. I am very pleased with the stewardship and competency among our young Congolese confreres in all they are doing to serve the most in need. Touching suffering with hope has been our mission for more than 800 years since our foundation of the Crosier Order.

Our dream of building a K-12 Catholic School has become true! This project will be completed at the end of December 2022. Praise be to God for many generous people who are supporting our Crosier religious life and ministry around the world. Crosiers in the Congo help the youth to develop their cognitive and social skills through education and sports.

Our new school that we are building in the Congo will help us to identify and nurture skills in the youth. In Butembo, young people are forced to drop out of school due to financial issues. At our new school, the Crosiers will be able to welcome and provide educational opportunities to children from poor families who could not be able to go to school because of the low-income situation of their families.

Furthermore, the majority of the families in the North-Kivu (Butembo)

region have an average number of five children per household and are struggling to survive by doing odd jobs. All the family's small income is therefore basically for feeding the family. Many of these households cannot afford the cost of educating their children and supporting them up to the level where they can sustain



themselves. Many persons are living a subsistence life with minimal resources.

Most of the youth are ready to defy some of the challenges in the world today if they are well prepared. However, many of them have given up hope and have buried their talents and are now involved in activities such as drug abuse, early marriages/ pregnancies, prostitution, and crime.



In addition to a quality education at our new school in Butembo with a capacity to serve 1,600 children, the Crosiers are going to start a Holy Cross Youth Sport Academy for boys and girls. The Crosiers in the Congo want to be close to the youth and to serve them. This program is designed for highly talented and committed players. It is focused on guiding young players

towards team playing through co-operative and intensive professional training. Participants will be coached to make effective choices about different sports. They will learn to understand the different positions within a team where they will be required to demonstrate specific attacking and defending skills. Training and development in speed, strength and endurance will also be incorporated into this program.

Creating a community and sustainable academy in order to develop sport activities in the region are our passions. The Crosiers hope is to identify sports talents in young people and to give them a chance to have a career even away from our academy. Also, Crosiers will engage young people in physical and moral education with a view to reduce crime rate, drug abuse as well as the fight against HIV/AIDS and early marriages/ pregnancies. Training young people in the sustainable management of bio-diversities and environmental protection will be one of our courses at our new school.



The anticipated outcome and the benefits of this Youth Sport Academy Project would be multi-dimensional. The Participants shall be trained and equipped with basic material for re-training and career development. With sponsorship, partnership and adequate consultations, the project shall equally reveal more hidden talents in young people not only from North-Kivu (Butembo) region but equally from other parts of our country. The coming together of young people from all parts of the country shall foster friendship ties and encourage national integration that is indispensable for the unity and the development of the nation.

The training activities shall equally present and encourage the spirit of competition. This competition will challenge all participants and help them to build strong personalities. The project through its participants will help fight poverty, illiteracy, crime and other behaviors within their specific communities. Thanks for all who are supporting the mission of our Church around the World.

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El Salvador Resources

For more information and resources on El Salvador and the stories of the people, please check out some of these awesome resources: Romero, Óscar A., and James R. Brockman. *The Violence of Love*. Orbis Books, 2010.

Vigil, María López. Monsenor Romero: *Memories in Mosaic*. Orbis Books, 2013.

Wright, Scott, and Jon Sobrino. *El Salvador: A Spring Whose Waters Never Run Dry*, Catholic Fund for Overseas Development (CAFOD), London, England, 1990.

Killed in El Slavador: An American Story. Retro Report. The New York Times https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8E_-VwWXKLU

Monsenor: The Last Journey of Óscar Romero. A film by Ana Carrigan and Juliet Weber

Shop Fair Trade!

Here at the Mission Office we are proud to offer a variety of Fair Trade items for sale! Our coffee and chocolates are our most popular for sure, but there are plenty of other items to check out! All of these items are sourced from Certified Fair Trade Organizations that provide a just wage to the workers.

Stop by and check it out!



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