

VIM EL SALVADOR

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Evangelist receiving Diplomas from The Most Rev. Martín Barahona

Renewal of Ministry in Diocese of El Salvador

A time of crisis is also an opportunity for moving forward in healthy ways. The Anglican Church in El Salvador was presented with such opportunity in the spring of this year when the number of active diocesan priests dropped to four plus 2 (Kay and Ed) from the Diocese of New Westminster. In a church in which pastors have usually been priests this situation could have been occasion for chaos; however, the Diocese developed a new vision of the importance of lay ministry in the Church. One outcome of this vision is already in practice. Five young persons are now in the field working as lay evangelism ministers. As well, six persons in their 30's are participating in preparation to serve as part-time evangelism ministers.

Ed Schmitt directed an intensive, 30-hour per week three-month, training programme for these persons selected for this ministry. The Rev. Boanerges Rosa, director of the Provincial Advanced Theological Education, Bishop Martín Barahona, Lica. Maritza Hernández, Social Worker, and Sr. Arturo Fernández Oliva, musician, all worked as part of this team. The training consisted in a review of the faith, exploration and articulation of the participant's personal faith along with practice in listening to others and communicating the Good News of the Reign of God to others in their cultural contexts.

After a service of commissioning, all five ministers are now working in various communities. Ed will continue working with them and their direct supervisors to provide support in this ministry. Providentially, the Lutheran University in El Salvador has established an eight-month, Saturday morning, Bible Survey course that began just as the Evangelism training programme was finishing. The lay Evangelists are enrolled in this course. (See: Theological Education page 2)

The part-time group of evangelism students meet for a Saturday. They are developing a growing awareness that evangelism is never a part-time task but a part of the call of all Christians to share the good news in season and out of season. However, along with the Saturday training sessions, each of these evangelists has specific responsibilities for explicit evangelical work.

One team of young people, the brothers Antonio and Alfredo López, is working in San Pedro y San Pablo, the parish in which Ed serves. Mario Nuñez, until recently the only commissioned lay minister in the Diocese, is supervising their campaign to share the Gospel in various hamlets in the area. They also are working in the major port city of Acajutla. Don Mario is one of the first Hispanic Anglicans in El Salvador and has extensive background in working in community efforts. ✠

Salvadorans remember the 11th of September

The parish church of San Juan Evangelista in San Salvador was full on the evening of 11 September. The parish hosted an interfaith service that included Christians (Lutherans, Anglicans, and Baptists), Muslims, Jews and members of the Baha'i group. All present came to show their solidarity with the American people on the anniversary of the attacks in New York, Washington, and the plane crash in Pennsylvania, and to stand publicly against terrorism or war as a solution to conflict in the world.

Taking place at 7 p.m., the congregation sang Salvadoran liberation hymns, with refrains such as, *We come with joy, Lord, planting your peace and love, desiring a world more human that gives birth to well-being and truth; and Give us a big heart for love, give us a strong heart to fight for... a new humanity loving without frontiers.* As well, the worship included *Make me a channel of your peace.*

Following a greeting by the Most Rev. Martín Barahona, Primate of the Province of Central America and Anglican bishop of El Salvador, the Very Rev. Luis Serrano, Rector of San Juan Evangelista, oversaw the service. Giving a message for people of Jewish tradition was Rabbi Daniel Zang; for the Islamic community, Imán Ernesto Abdala Abbas; for those of the Christian faith, the Lutheran bishop, the Most Rev. Medardo Gómez; and for the Baha'i community, Gabriel Torres. Each group also had a person to give a prayer in their own tradition. Everyone joined hands for the Baha'i prayer, faced the East for the muslim prayer, listened to a song in Hebrew as part of the Jewish prayer, and finally made a great circle again joining hands for the Christian prayer which ended with the offering of the Peace. ✠

Theological Education Programmes Mature

The Church in El Salvador has maintained strong commitment to theological education through the School for Women. This programme has educated laywomen in the faith for over eight years. The programme continues; however, the need for other areas of education for ministry has also emerged. In response to new models for Church leadership a training programme for Lay Evangelists has been developed. This programme is seen as one element in a continuum of theological educational programmes. The plan is to offer another intensive intake programme for lay ministry in 2003. As well, those persons presently in the Lay Evangelism programme are in a process of vocational discernment. During the one-year initial fieldwork the students are taking a Bible Survey course at the Lutheran University in San Salvador. The Church in El Salvador sees this university as a good resource.

Ed Schmitt recently visited the Biblical University of Latin America (UBL) in San José, Costa Rica, to investigate the possibility of working more closely with theology staff there. This ecumenical University has an important role in theological education in all of Latin America and Spain. An accredited university, UBL programs for courses in local

communities in cooperation with resources there. UBL is committed to education within the social, spiritual and political context of the students. It encourages the various traditions within the Church to develop programming that expresses the tradition's view. An Anglican approach to Church History, Liturgy and Spirituality would be an integral part of such programme. Ed Schmitt has been invited to spend a month at UBL preparing him to work with programming in El Salvador.

Also in Costa Rica, Schmitt attended a Provincial in-service training course on ecclesiology at St. Mary's Church, Siquirres. The programme was set in the Caribbean coastal area in which Anglicanism has had an important presence for over one-hundred years. One task of the Anglican Church in this region is celebration of the multi-cultural, multi-linguistic nature of the community. (See Maypole p.3.) Workshops such as this provide an important opportunity for interaction between Central American groups.

The Diocese and the Province seek to move to autonomy. A quality, appropriate educational preparation is essential for the mission of this Church. The link with the Lutheran University and The Biblical University provides for this work by giving a wider context and more resources. ✠

New Women's Ministry Committee

A new Women's Ministry Committee was struck at the Annual Meeting of the diocesan women in May. The new chair person is Doña Betty Barahona. The new officers will lead women's work for two years. Kay Schmitt is the Chaplain and an interested participant in the committee activities.

Since May the Committee has designed a diagnostic tool to give to the women of the various parishes for information on how the various groups organise themselves, what their program needs are, how many members they have, and any suggestions they might have for the central committee in its planning stage. The committee has distributed this questionnaire, and now is in the final steps of analysis and planning for the two-year period. The theme of the committee's work, drawn from the comments by women all over the diocese, is Unity and Spiritual Growth.

The Committee has learned some things unsurprising: we are women, Anglicans, most of whom have scarce economic resources, and have families and responsibilities. We are all sinners. Some of the things that pose obstacles to unity for women in the diocese are the difficulty of transportation -- by bus which is time-consuming and reduces motivation of women to participate in diocesan activities. The scarcity of economic resources means that almost everyone is struggling to survive, and it is difficult to find energy for other activities. The majority of women do not have telephones, which slows communication considerably.

The women in six parishes are organized with a Junta Directiva; two are not organized; and two are newly organized. Around 160 women attend parish group meetings, and of those about 125 are permanent members. There is strong interest in the central Committee to visit in the parishes and to offer leadership in that context. There is interest in learning more about the diocesan canons, having workshops for leadership development, Bible study, and the building of self-esteem. As well, a number of needs for support by the parish clergy were expressed.

The next task the committee members face will be that of detailing a calendar for the coming two years. ✠



Group of continuing education students at St. Mary's Church Suquierres, Costa Rica

CONTENTS

- 1 Renewal of Ministry in Diocese of El Salvador
- 1 Salvadorans remember the 11th of September
- 2 Theological Education Programmes Matures
- 2 New Women's Ministry Committee
- 3 Construction of Homes Happening
- 3 Retreat for Men
- 3 Maypole Dance by members Costa Rica Community
- 4 Santísima Trinidad Evangelism Program
- 4 Evangelists committed to rural ministry
- 5 Remembering Vilma

Construction of Homes Happening

Now a year and a half after the damaging earthquakes struck in El Salvador, the Diocese of this country is making its way through bureaucratic red tape. Construction is now taking place in Izalco where there will be 41 homes in a neighbourhood community. The community will have an Anglican church (San Marcos), a community centre, and a medical clinic. Social worker Maritza Hernández is identifying families in Izalco area who need the homes.

The Diocesan Centre houses the office of Coordination of the Housing Project and includes engineers, a social worker who promotes the homes and helps people with little or no employment develop micro-businesses. Diocesan doctor, Vladimir Olive, conducts clinics in the various new developments including Izalco and Maizal. Other homes are being constructed in El Congo at this time. As well, there will be construction in Maizal (near Cuilapa) and Usulután, east of the capital city.

Staff members explain that the objective of their project is to construct 200 homes that are dignified and secure, directed to families of scarce economic resources and accompanied by the development of an integral community. Basic services such as potable water and electricity will be installed. Families will need to pay between \$15 and \$20 U.S. per month to purchase these homes.

To qualify for a house buyers must be of major age and married. They will need a minimum income of \$143.77. U.S. They cannot own a house, land or lot on which they are making payments. Particular preference is given to single mothers, and widows or widowers. ☒



Sign at entrance of development



Retreat for Men

Anglican men celebrated a seaside retreat at the Diocesan Conference Centre, Cielo Mar, on the weekend, 17–18 of August. 35 men from around the Diocese participated. The theme of the retreat was Commitment: **God's commitment to me — My response.** The Rev. David Alvarado was chaplain and The Rev. Ed Schmitt gave talks on commitment and male sexuality. Prayer, reflection and relaxing were all part of the event. With the centre's seaside location free time was spent with swimming in the surf and games of fútbol. Cielo Mar (Heaven and Sea) conference centre also has quiet places

in which to have conversations or to be alone with Christ.

This programme took place on the same weekend that the Anglican Church in El Salvador had planned for its first Cursillo de Cristiandad weekend. This initial Cursillo was to have been presented with the support of the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles, California. This event was to take place in mid-August; however, because of decisions made by the US Cursillo organization, it was postponed to August 2003. The intention of the retreat was not to replace the Cursillo experience; but to work in preparation for the upcoming Cursillo. ☒



Maypole dance by members of the Siquirees, Costa Rica Community

The Caribbean culture is a strong element in the life of the Anglican Church in Central Region of the Americas. Neither rain nor the length of their pole, could have dissuaded the young people of St. Mary's Church, Siquirre from performing traditional dances. In order to share this part of their heritage with their guests at the theology workshop they removed a panel from the ceiling of the parish hall inserted the maypole and danced.

Santísima Trinidad Initiates

Evangelism Program

Two youth evangelists have now joined the staff of Santísima Trinidad, the parish where Kay Schmitt works as priest. Flor Hernández and Claudia Castro arrived at the beginning of September to begin work in evangelism in Colonia Santa Teresa, San Martín, where the church is located.

Outreach to families with children is their first project, covering a short list of such families within the parish, and reaching out to the families of children who have attended the Vacation Bible School during December of last year. Flor and Claudia will also work with parishioners in contacting families known to the members of the church. Flor will have the responsibility to maintain an ongoing relationship with these families, particularly those who respond with interest in the various programs of the church. She will also go from house to house to pick up the children, escort them safely to the church, and then home again after the program.

Also important to the program is the development of the youth group. When Santísima Trinidad's new building is constructed, hopefully this fall, an important part of its function will be to house a youth centre. While both Flor and Claudia are involved in this group, Claudia will have the responsibility to work with the group on being open to newcomers, to bring in friends that may benefit from the group, and to be aware of newcomers' needs as they move into the parish. She will systematically follow up on persons who do join the group or show an interest. Both young women are taking an 8-month Bible survey course. (see [theological education page 2](#)) which will help to strengthen their ministry. The new phase of ministry at Santísima Trinidad includes a new teacher of the children's program, Cristina Brizuela, who has completed a teacher training course on a professional level. As well, Alicia Áviles has accepted the role of Director of the Youth Program, which gives stability and organisation to the work of that group. She is able to consult the diocesan Youth Worker, Irma Alvarado, in planning and implementing programs with the young people. The group currently has 15 members.

After the initial phases of the evangelism program, the ministers will begin to visit prospective individuals and families from a list drawn up by the parish Junta Directiva, a group of women who know both the people and the area well. Claudia and Flor hope to teach a community literacy class in the church. ✠



Caín and Miriam

Evangelists committed to rural ministry

The mission of the Church is to proclaim in word and action the liberating presence of the Reign of God. An example of this is Miriam and Caín, a couple who live in the suburbs of San Salvador, where they encountered a vital Anglican Church. They participated in a diocesan training programme and now are spending their weekends at the newly established Church of San Marcos in the hamlet of San Juan Latrán as evangelists. They have a home in the community, in which relatives live. It is one of the settlements set up as a component of the land reforms which were part of the peace process.

Their community is at the end of a dusty or muddy trail, depending on the season, in the Department of Usulután. At least one resident in each household was a combatant in the revolutionary forces during the civil war. In addition to extreme poverty the members of the community are suffering ongoing spiritual and psychological effects as a result of the terror of the war and that have remained unresolved since.

Miriam and Caín witness to the redemptive and healing message of the Gospel. They provide pastoral care, Bible study, weekly worship and services to the community. This is only one example of the important ministry that is being performed by these two vital lay ministers. The area is lacking in social infrastructure. A two-room school is the only public building. Residents lack health care and many live with malnutrition. The level of violence within the community and the families is high.

Caín and Miriam are members of this group of ex-combatants who, like many other residents of the area, must work in

urban settings in order to earn the income necessary to live and pay off the mortgage on the land. Before The Anglican Church founded la Iglesia de San Marcos, in San Juan de Latrán no church had been established in this remote area. The evangelists have committed themselves to serve in this community, through proclaiming God's Reign.



Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.

(Matthew 8.20)



Remembering Vilma

By K. Schmitt

One of the first people I identified at Santísima Trinidad was Vilma Claros. She and several other women from the parish were attending the Annual Women's Conference held little more than a month after our arrival in El Salvador and before I actually took up duties at the parish. I identified Vilma because of her high-volume passionate voice, her capacity for argument on any subject without ever wavering on her position, and the full-throated song with which she would belt out the Salvadoran hymns about making our journey to the New Jerusalem.

I must admit, that when I realized that Vilma was one of the Junta Directiva of Santísima Trinidad, I was alarmed. Where, I thought to myself, is all that advice I received at the Working with Difficult People workshop? How am I going to cope with this woman? I cannot imagine I will be the cool, calm management officer who continues to say the correct thing and gently manipulate this person into seeing my point of view. I was right about that, at least. The only difference in Vilma's behavior and mine when we were at cross-purposes

was that I learned to back off, but only because I knew she would never budge.

Vilma was one of those large, buxom women who cared a lot about her family, the community, and the church. (Not saying, of course, that large and buxom are prerequisites for these attitudes!) Motherly. Warm-hearted. Good. These are all words I apply easily to Vilma, whose emotions could be close to the surface.

Vilma's life was not easy. She had a small business — a sort of confectionary or corner store that she operated from her house in Colonia Santa Teresa. Even so, the debts accumulated from buying the right kind of fridge and keeping up the stock, caused her huge anxiety. She had great difficulty keeping her head above the water on the economic scene. She also suffered poor health. Many people will gloss over their ailments, but not Vilma. When I asked how she was, I always learned in detail just exactly what part of her anatomy was causing her pain today. She suffered from diabetes, renal disease, high cholesterol, and arthritis. This was not, in my opinion, neurotic pain.

This was genuine, physical pain that rarely abetted, partly because the medications that she needed were so expensive and she probably didn't buy them, or when she did, she didn't take enough. Her health and her fight for survival could overwhelm her, and she struggled with depression.

Nevertheless, most of the time she came to the Sunday service, and her strong voice and her love of singing carried the rest of us along. When Vilma sang, her song was a heart-felt prayer.

My personal reflections on Vilma's death are that the specialists decided that this simple woman with her limited education was not worth their charity, for to get the treatment she needed, charity would have been necessary. There may be health nurses who visit the Santa Teresa Housing Co-op, but if there are, no one has ever told me about them. A person who is depressed and upset needs help to make sure they do not confuse their medications — if they have managed to obtain any medications.

There are public health clinics in El Salvador, where medications are sold at low cost. Yet is any cost low when one lives on less than \$100 U.S. a month like many people here? I question how good the services are. I once took Vilma to a hospital and sat with her in the tasteless plastic chairs through the long wait until she could be seen. Yet even these government hospitals are in the process of being privatized. My mind boggles. People who operate hospitals for profit are not likely to help the thousands and thousands of people like Vilma in this country. When you in Canada think about privatizing health care there, please remember the people like Vilma!

Suicide was ruled out by the government autopsy. Vilma died of pneumonia that resulted from her not taking her medications correctly. She was the spouse of Armando, the mother of Isabel, her daughter and a son, and the grandmother of two beautiful grandsons, Eduardo and Emerson. She was 38 years old. ❖

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