

Missionary Cooperation Plan

Sue Olson

Good morning, I'd like to thank Fr. Andre and the congregation for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the El Salvador Committee. Once a year, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee allows each parish to make an appeal in accordance with the Missionary Cooperation Plan.

Here at St. Sebastian, we are supporting SHARE El Salvador

SHARE El Salvador is an international, non-profit, solidarity organization. Its mission is to strengthen solidarity with and among the Salvadoran people in El Salvador and the United States in the struggle for economic sustainability, justice, and human and civil rights. SHARE's philosophy is Accompaniment – walking with Salvadorans, in a relationship of solidarity: of listening, of witnessing, of conversing, and of supporting.

St. Sebastian has partnered with SHARE since 1992. Our partnership currently supports 2 primary projects in the region of Chalatenango which includes our sister community of Teosinte.

The first is to strengthen woman's leadership – the objective is to contribute to the development of rural women through organizational strengthening, education and support for small economic initiatives. Teosinte's sewing co-op is one example of this.

The second is Holistic Formation of youth leaders – the objective is to give continuity to the struggle for social justice through the formation of new youth leaders that are committed to community development.

In August I had the privilege of representing St. Sebastian as one of the four delegates who traveled to Teosinte, El Salvador. Our delegation was one of accompaniment. We lived with families in the community. We learned about their history, their daily lives and the struggles they face, and their hopes for the future. Our visit coincided with the celebration of the repatriation of Teosinte. They celebrated with a parade and a mass followed by a communal meal. The second day of the celebration included a community gathering with music, a performance by the school children and speeches by community leaders.

We traveled to the Sumpul River with several survivors of the massacre that occurred there on May 14, 1980. While there, we listen to the testimonies of the survivors. It is difficult to relay the powerful emotions I felt that day. I can share with you that the survivors needed us to hear their stories. To know that we cared about what had happened to them.

Back in Teosinte we met with the directiva, who are the elected leaders of Teosinte. We learned that their current clean water supply is not sustainable and that they would like to purchase land to gain access to a spring that can supply the water they need. In the past the government officials would not allow them to move forward with this water project. SHARE and our delegations have been advocates for clean water in Teosinte. During our visit we met with the new mayor of Chalatenango is willing to support this project.

We also met with the youth who receive scholarships to attend high school and the university. Each of them expressed gratitude for the opportunity to further their education. Their areas of study vary

including nutrition, engineering, and agriculture to name a few. Many of the youth will need to leave the community to find work. I met Elena, a nurse, who was a past scholarship recipient; she continues to live in Teosinte while working in clinic in another community about an hour away. She too expressed her gratitude for her education.

I could spend much more time sharing stories about the people I met and the information I learned. But that will have to be another time.

I want to share a gift from our brothers and sisters in Teosinte. This cross was presented to us by the pastoral council along with well wishes for our parish community. Over the years we have given and received many gifts. Each of them has special meaning. You can see some of those gifts in the Teosinte display located in the gathering space.

Each week as we pray for our brothers and sisters in Teosinte know that they are also praying for us. Each and every person I met shared how grateful they were to know that we here at St. Sebastian care for them and accompany them on life's journey.

I hope for another opportunity to share more about my time in Teosinte. Today I would like to encourage you contribute to the 2015 Mission Appeal, knowing that the money you give is going to a worthy cause. Envelopes for the Missionary Cooperation Plan were in last week's bulletin and can be found in the pews today. Checks are made payable to St. Sebastian Parish.

Thank you.