

PALO ALTO FRIENDS MEETING

EL SALVADOR PROJECTS

NOVEMBER 2018 NEWSLETTER

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At the Canonization of Monseñor Oscar Romero in San Salvador

Dear Friends :

As always, there is much going on in El Salvador. In this newsletter I want to offer my perspectives on the uncertainties of the central government, presidential elections coming in February, concerns about an attorney general whose actions appear designed to benefit selected political and economic interest groups, and the historic canonization of Monsiñor Romero. I will also describe some ways that



Robert Broz, Program Director

our projects continue to benefit the communities we have supported for close to 30 years. I will bring you up to date on what we are accomplishing in the community and school of El Barío, our current university students and their social work projects, and I'll feature two of our past graduates and what they are doing today.

Let me start with "El Salvador in the news". As Mayor of San Salvador, Nayib Bukele lowered crime rates dramatically by installing street lights in formerly dark neighborhoods, and he accomplished many other beneficial projects. Although he is still very popular, he dropped in

recent polls after his New Ideas party (Nuevas Ideas) made his candidacy for the presidency impossible in the upcoming election by failing to meet filing deadlines, and Bukele then became the presidential candidate for the GANA party, a right-wing party formed after the 2009 elections. Tension between Bukele and GANA leaders started shortly after he agreed to run under their flag but wanted the logo of New Ideas (several sparrows), to be included on the GANA logo. As the formal campaigning has begun, Bukele is losing favor with the GANA's supporters as he continues what many see as his own platform, with little concern for GANA's politics or leaders. With candidate Bukele, GANA has a strong lead in current polls, but it is not expected that they will get the 51% needed to win outright. That outcome would lead to a second election, where Bukele is expected to win over either the major right-wing party, ARENA, or the left-wing FMLN. In this fast-changing political situation, it is even being rumored that the FMLN and ARENA might work together to defeat their common adversary, Bukele, in a second-round election.

Hugo Martinez, the young and highly educated presidential candidate of the FMLN, with an impeccable previous political career, and his vice-presidential candidate, Karina Sosa, also of the new younger generation of FMLN politicians, are gaining popularity among FMLN militants. This follows the discredited local and national assembly elections in March of 2018, when militants ab-



Candidates Carlos Calleja, Nayib Bukele, Hugo Martinez, Josué Alvarado

stained from voting, effectively handing over the elections to ARENA and other right wing parties. In recent surveys the FMLN ranks third, with only 10% support from the public.

Although Carlos Calleja, the candidate for the right-wing ARENA party, is ranked second, division within the party seems to keep his popularity from increasing, a problem the FMLN also faces with younger, non-militant voters.

The founding of a fourth party, Vamos (Let's Go), is yet one more sign of general discontent with the two major parties, ARENA and FMLN, both plagued by accusations of inherent nepotism, political enrichment, and corruption, with several cases now in court and others being pursued by the current Attorney General, Douglas Melendez, with cases seemingly weighted to hinder certain politicians and their parties.

Many people think Melendez wields his power only against enemies among the oligarchy, with the recent case targeting former President Tony Saca and six of his cronies as the first, historic case against rich politicians and their friends. However, it could be seen as retaliation, since Saca fell from grace after the ARENA party lost the presidential elections in 2009. Saca withdrew from ARENA to become one of several founding members of the GANA party, not considered an ally of ARENA. Under an initial



Attorney General Douglas Melendez

plea bargain, Saca and the others agreed to plead guilty to stealing 300 million dollars of federal funds for personal use in exchange for a reduced sentence and minimal civil restitution. This plea bargain was considered by many to be a mere slap on the hand, compared for months to a chicken thief getting a long jail sentence while the rich steal millions and are freed after a few weeks. Days later Melendez reneged on the agreement and all were found guilty. The court ordered seizure of properties and freezing of bank accounts, seeking to recover a total of 300 million dollars, with Saca and his family responsible for over \$260,000,000 of that total. The first seizure occurred at one of the Saca family homes, where twenty luxury cars valued at millions of dollars were found, and the house and its belongings were valued at over five million dollars.

A similar case is pending against former FMLN president Mauricio Funes, who has been living in exile in Nicaragua since early after his presidency ended in 2014. The initial case included charges of money laundering in the amount of about a million dollars. Funes was able to justify some funds and personal items as from his legitimate income. Some of the initial inventory in the case included his daughter's motorized Barbie car, Cuban cigars, and expensive liquors. The initial case, which many felt was politically motivated and some considered a witch hunt against the country's best president, was discarded for a much higher profile case named "Public Pillaging" (Saqueo Público) which involves Funes, his family, several friends, and political contacts, mentioning diversion of federal funds of over 351 million dollars during Funes's five years as president. Little effort to resolve or even talk about the case publicly by the current FMLN leaders most likely contributed to the obvious division and empathy among their masses, which I expect will insure FMLN's loss in the upcoming elections.

On a more positive note, the late Archbishop Monsiñor Oscar Romero was canonized by Pope Francis on Sunday, October 14th, 2018, along with Pope Paul VI and five others. Romero's canonization 38 years after he was assassinated by right-wing death squads and founders of today's ARENA party in El Salvador was long overdue.



Celebration at the Cathedral in San Salvador



In the canonization, Pope Francis presented the bloodied garments of Monseñor Romero and Pablo Vi as homage, as well as historical symbols.

Celebrations were held in in literally every Catholic church in El Salvador. On the main plaza in front of the cathedral, thousands watched the canonization as it was broadcast live from the Vatican. Even leaders from several evangelical Christian churches spoke out about this historic event, with Romero being the first saint in Central America. Although for these protestants Jesus is the only saint, most mentioned Romero’s worthiness for speaking out and defending the poor during the civil conflict. This event has brought Salvadorans together in a way that I have not seen in my 24 years here. It also opens the door for more investigations into the killing of Romero and the ARENA party and its politicians. Many ARENA hardliners are unhappy with Romero’s being canonized, understandably. An estimated 7000 Salvadorans, including President Sánchez Ceren and the first lady, made the trip to Rome to attend the canonization in person. Many people from El Barío and other communities we support were present in the procession and all-night vigil on the main plaza of San Salvador. With this international news many dear friends have sent me messages saying that my mother, Carmen Broz, would have been happy to see such an important event for El Salvador.



The El Barío Youth Group

Increasing Our Support in El Barío

Those of you who have been involved over the years will recall the village El Barío in rural Suchitoto, where my mother Carmen Broz first found her leading to work in El Salvador in July of 1986 as she accompanied survivors of massacres and scorched-earth warfare back to reclaim their lands. We have supported the village of El Barío since early 1989, almost 30 years. With increased donations in 2017 and 2018, we have been able to renew and increase our support in both the community and the K-12 public school there. With minimal funds, we were able to implement Saturday tutoring for high school seniors. The academic program was supported by two university students and two teachers from Suchitoto. The high school exit exam has been postponed due to the rains, but we should soon discover whether our efforts will have improved the exam results. In addition to the Saturday classes two other university students did their social work projects in the school, one teaching French and English to middle and high school students and the other working in the school’s library. I asked all of the university students working in public schools

to include some mentoring. With ten students from El Barío taking the entrance exam for the National University in October, the benefits of mentoring are evident. In past years only one or two of more than 20 seniors have attempted the exam. I think we will have similar results from two other rural



Karla Alfaro Tutoring

K-12 schools where university students from our program tutored and mentored older students. As a first attempt, the program had its problems, but for 2019 I have already met with teachers and the principal to see how we can increase planning. One idea we've discussed is to hold tutoring classes on only one Saturday a month, but starting in February, earlier than in 2018. We also plan to incorporate use of the science lab we have supported at the El Barío school, both during the school week and on Saturdays, as it is under-used by the permanent teachers during the school year.

Salary Support for Teacher Rita

Thanks to your support, we will continue to provide a small salary for teacher Rita to keep elementary 3rd and 4th grades separate, and we hope that in 2019 we increase her very modest pay. We have provided support for minor repairs and other school activities that are not covered by the government, and we hope to continue and expand into more areas in 2019. Working in the school has led to renewing past ties and support for other community programs, such as the recently reactivated youth group (especially for their work with elders in the village). Project AGE (Adults, Glasses, and Education, or Adultos, Gafas, y Educación), implemented by youth groups in various communities through the years continues as needed, but now the vast majority of elders who need reading glasses have them, and inexpensive reading glasses are available locally at prices similar to those in the US. The youth group in El Barío is exploring how continued interaction between their members and the elders can be fostered. One of their ideas is to plan monthly visits to the homes of aging adults, spending time, sharing, and documenting any needs that may be evident. They have already mentioned forming small groups and rotating their visits so that all active members will meet and share with all of the interested elders throughout the year of monthly visits. I think their idea is wonderful, and I hope to continue to finance what was in the past an activity of Project AGE, but would now involve a type of Christmas celebration near the end of the year, with a meal, plays put on by the kids, and music.

We finish the year with 19 university students, after starting in February with 21. For the first time since our university program began, we had two students drop out for undetermined reasons, rather than the more common academic and financial problems of the past. As you might imagine, both were emotional blows for me, as I tried to decipher each student's reasoning while doing my best to convince them to continue their studies, knowing in my heart that their personal development and potential would improve their chances and that of their families for a better future. I was not able to find out why they felt they couldn't continue, and so I have accepted the loss and moved on, dedicating my time and energy to supporting those students who continue in our program. All 19 of our current students are doing well, including the seven new students.

Two Exceptional Students

Although all of our students stand out as exceptional in my mind, in this newsletter I want to introduce you to two students I've selected, **Karla Alfaro** and **Giovanni Chevez**. Now in her fourth year studying Modern Languages (English and French), **Karla** has been a beneficiary of our program since 2016. She is doing wonderfully! Her English is nearly perfect, and I am sure her French is advanced as well. I see so much fire and life in all she does! She decided to do her social project at the school in El Barío and although French was not given importance by the principal she included an introduction to that language as well as mentoring students about the Modern Language program at the National University. I think knowing two new languages was impressive to most of her middle school and high school students, who knew



Karla Alfaro

that she came from the community of El Barío. It is likely that we'll see some of the young people she mentored decide to follow Karla's example and study for a B.A. in Modern Languages. Earlier in the year Karla asked if there was space at our coed student house, as it was uncertain whether the place she lived in at the time would continue to be available. Our house was full then, but a space opened up for Karla when one of our students left the program. Karla moved into the house at the beginning of this semester, in August, and is already acquainted with several of the residents from our program. She seems to fit in well with all the residents - a challenge, as you might imagine, with 20 students sharing a modest coed student house. Of the 20 student residents, 11 are students from our program, 7 are beneficiaries from 3 other programs, and 2 are universi-

ty students from Suchitoto who needed housing in the city but were not scholarship recipients.

Giovanni Chevez, one of our new students, and one of ten men in the house in San Salvador, is in his second year studying Law at the National University. Giovanni's family supported him in 2017 but realized they were unable to pay all the expenses required for his university studies, so he applied for support from our program this year. He and the other law student living in the house, a first-year student, have had two classes together and seem to complement each other in their studies. Filled with energy and fire like Karla, Giovanni's extra time is spent being active within the FMLN youth association, student unions at the university and in his home community of El Milagro (The Miracle). Giovanni's social work project is located in El Milagro, and focused on basic education about children's rights as applied to the compulsory education law (La Ley Lepina) in El Salvador. This is a touchy subject with older, poorer Salvadorans with less formal education, even those from the left who fought for the right for education for all. Personally, I would have rated his project and report as number 1, but he came in 4th in the evaluation by the other students. It was obvious to me that Giovanni put his full effort into his project, as he does with his studies. Since last year and the implementation of 40 hours of social work by our students, the students and I have become even more motivated, although I took note of Giovanni's forthright statement at the gathering where projects were evaluated: he feels that many of our students do their projects only because it's a program requirement and not as something to enjoy, take pride in, and give back by providing benefits to others. I believe that with student leaders like Giovanni in our program and at the student house, more of our students will recognize the importance of giving back to society, something my mother, Carmen Broz, showed me and that has become a large part of my life for the past 24 years. I should also mention



Giovanni Chevez

that while Giovanni's project was voted as 4th, Karla Alfaró's project was voted 3rd.

The Social Work of the Students

Next, I'll summarize the history of our social work projects requirement, and I'll tell you about this year's best project, according to the student vote. Beginning in 2017, and prompted by the model used by the Guatemala Friends Scholarship program (PROGRESA) for many years, we decided to require our university students to develop and implement a social work project of 40 hours each year. Continuing to develop the idea, this year students were required to submit a written proposal about their intended projects, solicit funding if needed, and receive approval by March 31st. Students from 2017 had the option in some cases to implement the same project in 2018. Only one chose this option and began her hours in late February. As before, students had until August 31st to finish their projects, finalizing the process by submitting a final report with a written summary of the project, an evaluation, photos, and control forms signed by the person or group responsible for supervising their hours. All projects were converted to standard PDF files and put on Google Drive, where students completed an online evaluation of each project, including their own. To finish up we held our mid-year student meeting on Sunday, September 30th, with most of the meeting being dedicated to student presentations of their projects, with time for a final evaluation. It was clear to me that many of the students really did wonderful work, but as Giovanni boldly stated, a few did only the minimum necessary to meet the requirement. I knew from the online results more or less which the top three projects would be, but I found it motivating to see many students present their projects with pride and evident self-value.

The overall best project was not a surprise. Karol has been an exemplary student and person throughout her almost four years in our program. This year, to add a bit more complication to her life and studies, she had a beautiful baby girl and moved in with her partner, this while finishing up her last year in Nursing without compromising her grades or professional practical work. She is currently finishing the required professional practical work, and is scheduled to graduate in 2019. Her social project involved working with the ministry of health promoter



Karol and her family



Karol with a patient

who visits her community. She assisted in prenatal check-ups in normal and at-risk pregnancies, check-ups of elders, newborns, and infants, as well as general nutrition, working through the community's members. She ended up doing more than the 40 hours required, and continues to help the government promoter when he visits the community every two weeks. Like many of our students, Karol has become like a daughter to me. Her life has not been easy, but she has never been close to giving up. Seeing so clearly now the qualities that are hardest to determine when students apply to our program, Karol's love for nursing and helping others, makes my work and your support all the more valuable, knowing that Karol will make the world a better place for those who surround her.

Our Students, Past and Present

As Project Director, I find that I form unique, individual relationships with our students. Over time, friendships develop and students often become part of my family, as Karol did. The roles of Director and student are always there, but this changes as our students mature, finish their studies, and start the adventure of life's next stage. I stay in contact with the majority of the now over 100 graduates, remain friends, and share the joys and struggles of life, mine and theirs.

To conclude my report, I want to share with you what two of our previous students are doing today. Vanessa, who graduated as a physical therapist in 2012, worked at a small community clinic a couple days a week and provided low-cost therapy for the village of El Barío, where she lives. Although older by five years, she became good friends with Angelina, who studied to become a clinical lab

technician, graduating in 2012. Both shared time together at our women's student house, where their friendship grew over time. Angelina worked for about a year in the same communal clinic's laboratory close to El Barío, where Vanessa had been working. Both were part-time jobs, and neither generated sufficient income. Vanessa's older sister, another of our graduates, headed north several years ago, following her boyfriend after not finding work in El Salvador as a registered nurse. Angelina's boyfriend went to the U.S. to seek a better future, but found he didn't like the "American Dream," especially not being documented, and so after only a couple of years he returned to El Barío where he and Angelina were married. More recently, in July of 2017, Vanessa took out a small loan and opened a Medical Laboratory in Suchitoto, hiring her friend Angelina as the main Lab Technician. She does the accounting, and with her general training in health takes blood samples, receives urine and fecal samples, give respiratory therapy, and does pretty much everything else the business requires. They seem to be making it work, being able to repay the loan and pay the rent while they continue to build up their clientele. Even more inspiring, as both started repaying



Vanessa with Angelina at the Lab

their student loans, they asked if their payments could be included to give a little more money to teacher Rita in El Barío. We were glad to approve!

Both Vanessa, 34, and Angelina, 30, have children. Angelina, who started her family earlier, has a beautiful eight-year old daughter, Rubi Esmeralda, who is in teacher Rita's 3rd grade class. Angelina is currently eight months pregnant with another girl, whose name will be Leah Giselle. Vanessa's little girl, Maily

Fernanda, is almost three years old and is still in pre-school. The relationship with the little girl's father did not work out, but Vanessa's parents help out while she is at the clinic in town. Like many of our students, these two women show us that our programs work. Both could have gone to the U.S. with support from their families, without documents, in search of a better future, but both are happy here in El Salvador with all its problems, making it work, supporting the same rural school where they studied, where their children now study, building their families, and now repaying their student loans, which helps us add a little more to teacher Rita's small income.



Angelica with Children. Our students also do social work in the library.



Giovanni Chevez is studying law at the University,

The Effectiveness of Our Work

Armed with guns and drones, U.S. militia groups head to border, stirred by Trump's call to arms against migrant 'invasion'... That's a headline from the *Washington Post* of November 4, 2018, published as tensions surged just two days before a midterm election that many of us considered to be the most significant of our lives. You'll be reading this newsletter in late November, when all of us will know much more about events that will transpire on the U.S.-Mexico border. We'll probably all still be absorbing the election results, peering through mists of uncertainty toward the future of our nation, our hemisphere, and the whole world, seeking truth through the din of competing narratives and "alternative facts," finding our way, individually and together.

That "invasion," as we all know, is fear-mongering slander that miscasts desperate Hondurans and other migrants who are openly walking north through Mexico, fleeing from the torrents of violence that threaten their lives, seeking to escape poverty few Americans can even imagine, persisting despite threats of assault upon arrival by the world's most powerful military and heavily armed vigilantes, still clinging to their hope that the Statue of Liberty extends her invitation to *...your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free... Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me...* [Emma Lazarus]

Some years ago, I sat at an outdoor table facing the plaza in Suchitoto with our late friend Frank Cummings, a partner with Robert Broz in programs to help poor Salvadoran kids gain university educations. Frank called to the young man who had brought our tea, asking him how many students finished high school (*secundaria*) with him – about 30 – and of those how many had slipped north to the U.S. The answer: all but this one young man. Frank told me earnestly that this story confirmed a major purpose of our programs – to enable young Salvadorans to remain with their families, serve their communities, and create a better future without facing the perilous and uncertain ordeal of a clandestine journey to the U.S., where now both official and volunteer violence may greet them. And this is the miracle of the El Salvador Projects – with such modest resources, carefully managed, young Salvadorans do complete their educations, do stay in El Salvador, do forge productive lives and sustain their families, and do create a better future for that tiny, beleaguered country.

Please – donate generously, as you have so often in the past. You are the sustaining angels who make these projects possible. You offer young Salvadorans a future they can believe in, strive toward, and make real. THANK YOU!!!

Jamie Newton,
for the El Salvador Projects Committee

Dear Friends,

For nearly three decades, the El Salvador Projects have helped people in poor rural communities gain an education, meet basic health needs, restore meaningful activities to their elder years, and in other ways move from marginal lives of poverty to sustainable self-reliance. Your support makes visions real.

As we prepare this newsletter, we are acutely aware of the dangers and hardships faced by migrants who travel north to escape the violent turmoil that is increasing in the small countries of Central America, and to find work that will pay enough to feed, clothe, and house their families. Robert's report describes current social and political conditions in El Salvador, introduces several students in our university loan program, and tells you the stories of graduates whose educations enable them to meet needs in their communities, earn a livelihood, and repay their loans to help us offer assistance to future students. Thanks to your commitment and generosity, Karol in a nursing program, Giovanni in law school, health service providers Vanessa and Angelina, and other bright young Salvadorans whose

studies are made possible by your donations will not be found among the migrants struggling through Mexico toward the United States.

Some of you accompany your donations with personal notes that lift our spirits. Corinne Smith, a long-time supporter in New Mexico, wrote: *Dear Robert and Friends - I am always so touched by the stories in your newsletter. Your educational programs are improving the lives of so many in your community and making it possible for your graduates to give back to its members. Education is the key to so many of our world's problems and your model is working beautifully to show that there is a way to stay in El Salvador or other parts of Central America and make safe and productive communities where people can thrive. And so you've inspired me to make an additional donation to your program this year. Please see that it goes to Teacher Rita. Peace and blessings...*

Thanks, Corinne, and thanks to all of you for your part in creating opportunities to learn, to serve, and to keep hope alive.

Hulda Muaka, Clerk, El Salvador Projects Committee

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