

# Sistering Partnerships with SHARE

## *Discernment Guide and Informational Packet*

*"There is much that The United States has to offer El Salvador, but there is just as much that El Salvador has to offer the United States. Together, we can develop the approach that will be needed to assure that the economic, social, and political futures of both El Salvador and the United States are humane and progressive."* ---- Archbishop Oscar Romero

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Dear Friends,

The SHARE Foundation is delighted to hear of your initiative towards becoming a **SHARE Sistering Partner!** At a time in which our world tends to limit correspondence to sound bytes and individuals to numbers, The SHARE Foundation invites you to explore this **life-changing relationship.** For the past thirty-five years, partnerships between North American and Salvadoran communities have been the wind in the sails of a **movement to build justice and dignity among the impoverished majority in El Salvador.** We invite you to a land of towering volcanoes, raging rivers, and shaded coffee farms to join in the daily struggle for justice that Salvadorans have courageously engaged in for decades.

Those who answered the call to support Salvadorans through a bloody civil conflict and their resettlement upon leaving refugee camps three decades ago concur that at this moment in history, El Salvador is more in need of accompaniment than ever. As the global media's attention turns to other parts of the world, the Salvadoran people are living under a yolk of economic hardship that intensifies each year. To counteract this weight, The SHARE Foundation works to develop leadership, empower women, promote citizen participation, and support environmental justice. **Thank you** for taking the first step on a journey that promises to be filled with hope, adventure, and a challenge to become more human through genuine relationship with a warm, faithful and resilient people.

Sincerely,  
SHARE El Salvador – SHARE Foundation

## 1. Introduction

The SHARE Foundation is a network of individuals, organizations and communities in the U.S. working together since 1981 to support the empowerment of impoverished and marginalized communities in El Salvador as they strive to construct long-term solutions to the problems they face. SHARE accompanies grassroots organizations in El Salvador as they work towards this vision. SHARE and these local counterparts promote four Core Values: Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, Citizen Participation, and Environmental Justice. Sistering relationships are central to this process!

*"Each Sistering committee embodies what it truly means to walk in solidarity with the poor. They work tirelessly on the needs of the Salvadoran communities, and have developed relationships which go far beyond material assistance. They have learned from each other, and grown together; they have become family."* --Lisa Zeilinger, former SHARE Promoter

Sistering through SHARE means forming a relationship of accompaniment and support with organized regions in El Salvador as they work towards social and economic justice. For thirty years, groups in the U.S. have formed these partnerships, including churches or communities of any denomination or religion, schools and universities, solidarity committees, clubs, etc. **Sistering partnerships are relationships formed between communities in the US and El Salvador based on faith, hope, and a commitment to work together for a more just world.**

**Sistering Partnerships** are geared towards churches and community groups who wish to **grow spiritually** and share the deep faith of the Salvadoran people, engage in **global citizenship** and experience a rich culture while also building lasting relationships of solidarity.



*Sistering is a relationship of "accompaniment". It is people of two different cultural backgrounds sharing their faith, their similarities and their uniqueness. It is a relationship in which, both communities become more aware of their call to experience the face of Jesus in all people regardless of language, culture, economic status, and ethnicity.*

*The outcome for both sistering communities is an appreciation for their own differences and an awareness of the common family unity of all people. It is a relationship being reciprocal with receiving as well as giving. Sistering empowers both communities to share in many dimensions. Sistering is truly an immersion and conversion experience!*

Teresa Aley  
Good Shepherd Parish, Shawnee, Kansas

## **2. About SHARE**

### **Mission**

SHARE strengthens 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.

### **Vision**

To transform society, SHARE increases the capacity of organized communities and their partners through our model of mutual accompaniment.

We serve and support the empowerment of poor and historically marginalized Salvadoran communities in their struggle to meet their immediate needs, as well as building sustainable long-term solutions to the problems of poverty, underdevelopment, and social injustice.

### **Core Values**

SHARE's work includes binational projects and programming in El Salvador and the United States that support the following institutional core values:

- **Women's Empowerment:** Provide access to education and opportunities for integrated development to women and girls in order to improve their economic, social and political positions in their communities and organizations
- **Citizen Participation:** Promote active participation in democratic processes, decision-making and advocacy campaigns
- **Leadership Development:** Cultivate the skills of a broader base of people including women and young people so that they can become democratic leaders and empower others
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Advocate and raise awareness about environmental justice, including prevention and responses to climate change
- **Human Rights:** Accompany the struggle of victims of forced disappearance, torture, and grave human rights abuses as they seek the truth, justice for their families, and reparations for the damage they've suffered.

### **Our Model**

As an organization of international solidarity, SHARE recognizes that it is not our role to enter into communities, identify problems, and define and finance solutions. Instead, it is the people and communities living the cycles of injustice and oppression that need to lead the long-term efforts for structural change. Our role is to support the empowerment of and walk in solidarity with these communities, organizations, and individuals. This is called mutual accompaniment.

## **Three Pillars of Accompaniment**

U.S. groups who partner through SHARE accompany communities in El Salvador in three ways:

### **I. Physical and Moral Accompaniment**

Building lasting relationships between communities in El Salvador and the United States by creating opportunities for them to share experiences, joys, and struggles. Join SHARE on a **delegation** or host a **tour**. Send delegations from the U.S. to visit, learn from, and build friendships with partnered communities in El Salvador, and invite them to visit and educate U.S. communities on organized tours. Correspond and share reflections.

### **II. Financial Accompaniment**

Supporting communities as they seek sustainable alternatives to poverty and just rural development. Raise funds for locally-led and designed projects that promote people's ability to create local change for better conditions. Projects foster: leadership, education and training, organization, widespread participation, women's empowerment, assessment of needs and proposals for solutions, and advocacy with local and national governments.

### **III. Advocacy Accompaniment**

Advocating for US policies and supporting Salvadoran advocacy efforts that promote respect for human rights and sustainable solutions to poverty and rural development. Education, mobilization, and lobbying for sustainable improvement of economic and social conditions for the majority poor in El Salvador.

### **Contact Us**

Partnering through SHARE means building relationships, based on respect and solidarity, in order to walk side-by-side on the road to more just and equitable relations between the U.S. and El Salvador. As you read this Discernment Guide and consider taking the next step in this transformative relationship, we invite you to contact us with any questions or for support.

**For more information, please contact:**

**Claudia Martínez, SHARE Grassroots Program Coordinator**

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### 3. What are Sistering Partnerships through SHARE?

**Sistering Partnerships** provide churches, faith groups and communities in the United States with the opportunity to develop long, lasting relationships with a people of deep faith and commitment. With the legacy of martyrs like Archbishop Oscar Romero and Father Rutilio Grande ever present, El Salvador is an incredibly rich environment for deepening one's own faith and experiencing first-hand the struggle for social justice .

North Americans and Salvadorans are able to form close, lasting relationships focused on solidarity with the poor, growing in faith and awareness of social justice issues, and reflection. People from the United States share their talents and time with their brothers and sisters in El Salvador and are inspired by the deep faith and hope of the Salvadoran people. Through mutual understanding and compassion, Sistering Partners help work for a world where peace and justice prevail. SHARE offers Sistering Partners the opportunity to understand global issues and engage in them, creating deeper understanding and compassion for the people of El Salvador. SHARE offers Sistering Partners many ways to remain involved in work for justice in El Salvador upon return.



Utilizing our God-given gifts to participate in an effort that is greater than ourselves is inspiring and fulfilling. And when each of us develops and contributes our gifts to the greater whole, we are able to work together towards a more just world, a fuller embodiment of the Kingdom of Justice and Peace to which we aspire.

#### **Sistering Partnership Highlights**

- **Delegations** come to El Salvador to build relationships with people, communities and projects. In addition, delegates learn about key themes or visit important sites related to El Salvador's history and current challenges.
- **Tours** are organized visits of Salvadoran community members to their U.S. counterparts. They provide opportunities for advocacy, fundraising, education, and relationship-building.
- **Advocacy** for fair and just US policies, including trade policy and foreign policy, that promote respect for human rights.
- **Projects** are regional women and youth organizing initiatives which invest in people and the ability to create structural change for a better life. CRIPDES projects promote leadership, education, civil participation, women's empowerment and advocacy.

*Keep reading for more information about SHARE's Sistering Partnerships!*

*"We all need to open our eyes and hearts to listen to our brothers and sisters all over the world. Each one of our brothers and sisters has a great story to tell."*  
*-SHARE Delegate and Sistering member, 2010*

## Delegations

For many delegation participants, this experience is life-changing. With thirty-five years of on-the-ground experience, SHARE can offer a broad look at El Salvador's history and current reality or work with Sistering Partners to explore specific issues of interest.

Delegates learn first-hand about El Salvador's history, current struggles, and hopes for the future. They build relationships with people and communities while learning about issues affecting El Salvador and the work being done to bring about change. As an important part of an ongoing relationship with the Salvadoran people, delegates visit their partner organizations and do an overnight homestay in a rural community.

SHARE works closely with Sistering Partners to build an itinerary appropriate for each group and support the planning and preparation process. We currently host an average of five Sistering Partner delegations per year. Itinerary possibilities include:

- Visit and prayer at the sacred sites: Archbishop Oscar Romero's home and tomb, the Monument to Truth and Memory, a civilian war memorial, the Romero Museum and Rose Garden dedicated to the memory of the Jesuit Martyrs at the University of Central America.
- Visits with Christian Base Communities and opportunities to learn about and participate in liberation theology.
- Meetings with organizations that lead the Salvadoran social movement around issues of interest to the delegation participants, such as women's and youth rights or environmental justice and human rights activism.
- An overnight homestay in an organized rural community. Delegations meet with the community council, tour the community, accompany host families in their daily activities, and share in the struggles and joys of daily life in the Salvadoran countryside.
- Visits to cooperatives or grassroots organizations involved in local development and the creation of alternative economic models.
- Learn about the devastating effects of the Salvadoran civil war and current efforts to build peace and democracy in El Salvador.
- Opportunities to participate in advocacy issues of the day, including meetings with the US Embassy, visits to areas affected by mining, or visits to cooperatives working on food sovereignty issues.



*"The question should be what didn't move or touch me; every minute was jam-packed--so informative, so motivating, so inspirational. Each leader offered so much in knowledge, joy and giving. Each were very sensitive to the needs and to requests. Never has there been such giving leadership. The delegates themselves were so inspiring, each bringing and sharing a unique gift." SHARE Delegate 2010*

**Tours** are a unique way for Grassroots Partners to deepen their relationships. Sistering Partners invite members of their Salvadoran sister community and grassroots organizations to visit the United States and spend time in their city and church. Having Salvadorans visit is an opportunity to reach out to key members of your community, as not everyone is able to come on a delegation to El Salvador. Tours are an excellent way to educate people about El Salvador and to energize them for advocacy and solidarity work, while also providing Salvadorans with a unique cross-cultural experience.

**Nothing equals hearing the life story and work of a Salvadoran dedicated to justice in their own voice.** Tours provide excellent opportunities for relationship-building as well as providing a deeper context for the need to continue advocacy, fundraising, and education efforts.

SHARE supports Sistering Partners in organizing tour itinerary and logistics, including preparation meetings with Salvadorans and support for the visa process.

### **Advocacy and Ongoing Education**

After learning about the often devastating effects of US foreign and trade policy on the poorest Salvadorans and the faith that motivates Salvadorans to action, delegates leave El Salvador with a desire to remain involved. One crucial way SHARE supports and encourages Sistering Partners to do so is through supporting advocacy efforts and campaigns in the U.S.

SHARE supports these efforts through ongoing education and direct advocacy actions that promote respect for human rights and sustainable solutions to poverty and rural development. During the time of the war, direct advocacy actions from the US could save the lives of a political prisoner and supported Salvadoran churches in calling on the US government to end military aid. Today, advocacy actions may promote fair trade policies or call upon authorities to investigate politically-motivated crimes.



A key element of our advocacy program is educating people in the United States about how the actions of the US government and multinational corporations affect everyday Salvadorans. As members of Sistering Partners grow in their commitment to global justice, they reach out to others in their community to demand respect for fundamental human rights, fair trade, or just foreign policies.

### **Regional Partnerships for Sustainable Development**

SHARE offers Sistering Partnerships a unique opportunity to build long-term relationships with and support historically poor and marginalized rural communities in El Salvador as they seek sustainable, long-term change to the issues of poverty, injustice and exclusion. Sisters have the opportunity to build relationships with Salvadoran youth, families and communities while participating in their struggle for justice and peace.

Sistering Partners build relationships with a grassroots organization called CRIPDES, an association of communities working for the organization and development of rural El Salvador, and the dozens of communities that CRIPDES region represents. Our partnership with CRIPDES regions allows us to reach hundreds of communities and thousands of families, empowered to identify problems and propose solutions.

Partnering with CRIPDES through SHARE provides the twofold benefit of:

- Forming relationships with the individual people and communities that make up those regions.
- Supporting broad-based, regional organizing that empowers communities, women and youth to seek long-term, sustainable change.

SHARE provides regular communication about regional development projects that Sistering Partners support, including project reports as well as updates on activities and events, communities, and the people affected by SHARE sponsored projects. This communication allows Sistering Partners to remain connected to and inspired by their partners in El Salvador, as well as continue learning about the struggles and achievements of their partner communities.

### **Current Sistering Partner-Supported Project**

#### *Rural Women's Empowerment*

This project seeks to contribute to women's development in the region, strengthening women's organization and productive initiatives, providing resources and tools to reinforce women's autonomy and encourage participation in community organizing spaces. Project components will also support community and municipal efforts that encourage women's equality and recognize their rights.



This project includes:

- Training, supplies and support for **family vegetable gardens** for **family groups** to work towards food sovereignty, manage the food crisis, and provide additional income.
- Continuing support family gardens.
- Support for women's committees to motivate and promote **women's participation** in communities
- **Strengthen the productive fabric of organized women** and improve their economic situation through **microcredit loans, savings and loans groups**, and a **small business cooperative** for local small initiatives.
- Increase awareness around laws that **promote women's rights**

## **4. Sistering Partner and SHARE Commitments**

### **Sistering Partners:**

- Support SHARE's mission and four core values
- Make a five-year minimum commitment
- Raise funds for community organizing projects
- Contribute to SHARE through annual membership
- Come on Delegations to El Salvador and host Tours of Salvadorans
- Engage in Advocacy on behalf of the poor and marginalized in El Salvador

### **SHARE:**

- Organizes, coordinates, and facilitates delegations and tours from El Salvador.
- Administers and monitors projects
- Communicates regularly about projects, including stories of the communities and individuals affected and benefited by sistering partners
- Keeps sistering partners up-to-date about current events and issues in El Salvador through our blog and eNews bulletin
- Helps generate ideas and provides support for fundraising activities
- Helps facilitate communication between U.S. and Salvadoran Sistering Partners.

## **5. Making the Decision: Discernment Steps for Sistering Partnerships**

*"I have learned a lot about hope and healing after collective trauma—about holistic, sustainable community development—as well as how to best work with people—the beauty and importance of accompaniment." SHARE Delegate*

Please find below a list of recommended steps as you begin discerning whether or not to begin a Sistering Partnership with SHARE. **Communicate with our Grassroots Program Coordinator** for more information. We are happy to put you in touch with existing Sistering Partners to support you in this process, who can provide information, testimony, and strategies for gaining support.

### **1. Get Informed**

A lively group within your organization should be interested in exploring a Sistering Partnership. Delegate a team to meet with individuals and organizations that could support your process and designate a primary contact person for SHARE. Contact SHARE for more information. Meet with interested people, and invite a SHARE representative when possible, to get to know one another and discuss Sistering. Scriptures, reflection questions, or videos and other informational material could be helpful!

### **2. Involve Your Community**

Once your core group has the information it needs, involve your community. Possibilities include:

- Invite a speaker who has participated fully in the SHARE Sistering Program, or one who can address issues facing Salvadorans today;
- Show a movie about El Salvador and discuss its relevance;
- Invite community members to sign up for our list serve, which covers the major events which impact the people of El Salvador as they happen;
- Hold a Salvadoran cultural event, complete with Salvadoran *comida tipica* (typical food) and music!
- Keep El Salvador in people's thoughts—post photos of your sistering community and region around public spaces, write about El Salvador in your bulletin or paper, give presentations to the community. Focus on why structural problems continue to exist in El Salvador and how Salvadoran communities and Sistering Partnerships through SHARE are responding.

### **3. Come to El Salvador**

Coming to El Salvador on a “discernment delegation” is an important first step in establishing ties with a new partner. These are on average 8-day trips in which you will have learn first-hand about El Salvador past and present, SHARE’s accompaniment work, and the people and communities in your proposed sistering region. It expands the boundaries of our awareness, and our capacity for solidarity, in a way that only a face-to-face meeting can.

**Bringing key members of your institution to El Salvador on a delegation is the best way to gain their support!**

### **4. Discuss and Reflect**

Take time to evaluate the benefits and feasibility of committing a Sistering Partnership for a minimum of five years. SHARE recommends that you use the reflection questions listed below to discuss whether this relationship is right for you. Inform SHARE of your decision!

*If you decide to begin a sistering partnership, enjoy the joy, hard work and adventure of this new beginning and all the fruits that it will bear!*

## **6. Questions for Reflection for Sistering Partnerships**

As you learn more about forming a **Sistering Partnership** through SHARE, please consider the following questions. SHARE recommends that you review these questions within your group and invite SHARE to join the conversation!

### **Institutional Commitment**

Is there a strong institutional commitment throughout your church to El Salvador and partnering with SHARE that could last at least 5 years? Are there several people in your church committed to this relationship, to assure sustainability despite normal changes in staffing or membership? Has your entire church been educated, or has the process remained within a reduced group or committee?

### **Mission**

Does your committee's mission match SHARE's mission and ideas on development? Does your committee agree with SHARE's guiding principles (Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, Citizen Participation and Environmental Justice)?

### **Accompaniment Model**

How does your committee view and understand accompaniment? Is your committee willing to commit to the three kinds of accompaniment that SHARE partnerships involve (Physical/Moral, Financial, Advocacy)?

### **Financial Accompaniment**

Do you agree with and are you willing to work within SHARE's model for financial accompaniment?

- Work through the "Directiva": Support for local organization by working first with SHARE and the democratically-elected regional council of CRIPDES, or directiva, in matters related to decision-making, funding, gift-giving, activities planning, etc.
- Invest in people: Funding for projects which go beyond charity to promote long-term solutions to the problems of poverty, underdevelopment, and social injustice. Projects which invest in people by promoting one or more of the following criteria: women's empowerment, leadership development, citizen participation, education, and mobilization.
- Regional projects: Funding for broad-impact projects at the regional level, rather than individual community projects or individual gifts. These projects should be proposed by the regional council (directiva), representative of community participation, and approved and administered by SHARE.
- Grassroots Program: Support for SHARE's Grassroots Program operations within your church's means through: yearly sistering membership, 20% project administration fee, and other forms of support when possible.

### **Objectives**

What are your objectives for forming a sistering partnership? Can these objectives be accomplished by forming a sistering partnership through SHARE?

### **Support**

What kind of support do you need from SHARE to build and sustain your sistering partnership?

## 7. Getting Started...

### **Make it Formal**

Once you have decided to enter into this exciting partnership, SHARE recommends that you dedicate some time to celebrating and formalizing the commencement within your community. Possibilities include:

- Hold an assembly or a ceremony, or dedicate time at mass or service.
- Invite members to formally “sign-on” to the relationship by signing a statement of support, a covenant, or a wall mural with photos from your discernment delegation. *Please see sample covenant below.*
- Hold a public event, party, picnic, potluck, or celebration.
- Invite SHARE representatives to come and speak with your community
- On your next delegation to El Salvador, ask SHARE to help organize a joint celebration with your sistering partner.

### **Initial Activities**

Here are some of our ideas on how to get started!

**Communication:** Ongoing communication is essential to relationship building with the people and communities of the regional partnership. First, write your partner region and let them know of your decision. Topics may include questions for your partner, or sharing from your own community about a variety of issues, including the following: current projects and activities, challenges communities face, reflections, hopes and goals, opinions on policies and current events, happenings in people’s personal lives, coordination on joint work, etc.

**Delegation:** Coming to El Salvador is important for establishing and maintaining ties with a new partner. Preparation should start between one year and six months ahead of time and include orientation to the delegation, education about the relevant issues, and possibly a presentation from a SHARE representative.

**Advocacy:** Our voice and vote as U.S. residents or citizens is an important gift we can bring to the partnership. SHARE makes information readily available through our listserv about important issues and advocacy requests. Sign up for the eNews on our website ([www.share-elsalvador.org](http://www.share-elsalvador.org)). Regular communication with your partner region will also guide you regarding which issues are most effecting those communities and what type of advocacy support can be provided.

**Host a Tour:** Invite people from your partner region to visit your community on tour! Accompany members of your sister community or grassroots organization as they learn about your home and share their life and struggles with your community. Tours are an excellent way to teach your community about El Salvador and energize people for advocacy and solidarity while providing Salvadorans with a unique cross-cultural experience.

**Support Regional Projects in your Partner Region and Communities:** A crucial way of accompanying our Salvadoran brothers and sisters is by supporting their efforts for organization, development and justice. SHARE has put together a **Grassroots Fundraising Guide** to make fundraising easy! **Contact us** for a copy of the guide and specific information on the projects and people your efforts will support.

**Organize community education events:** Invite speakers, host a Salvadoran cultural evening, organize a march or vigil, present a play or concert, and use the opportunity to raise awareness and support for your accompaniment goals. Our **Grassroots Fundraising Guide** has more ideas!

**Support SHARE's functioning costs:** Through our Monthly Sustainer program, SHARE's U.S. base enables SHARE to coordinate Grassroots Partnerships, Advocacy, education, and Community Development projects. Fundraising possibilities include everything from holding an event to writing a letter to making a personal monthly commitment.

**Send us your ideas and proposals!** We are only confined by the limits of our own creativity and are always looking to share ideas among our partners in the U.S.!

## **Sample Sistering Covenant**

As we draw inspiration from our moral traditions and from the prophetic message and life of Monsignor Oscar Romero, we come together as global citizens to affirm our commitment to \_\_\_\_\_, our Sister Region in El Salvador.

We recognize that we have different cultures, languages, and that our relationship as sisters and brothers crosses national boundaries. We also joyfully celebrate our oneness in spirit and in love as communities committed to the creation of a better world.

In the spirit of a more just, humane world where, in Monsignor Romero's words, "Hope is linked inseparably with social justice," We the people of \_\_\_\_\_ community make this pledge to our CRIPDES Sister Region based on SHARE's discernment guide:

### ***I. We support SHARE's mission***

SHARE's mission is to serve and support the empowerment of poor and historically marginalized Salvadoran communities in their struggle to meet their immediate needs, as well as building sustainable long-term solutions to the problems of poverty, underdevelopment, and social injustice.

### ***II. Institutional commitment***

We have the support and backing of our institution for this relationship. We pledge to continue educating and involving more people in our institution in the three pillars of accompaniment so that they will remain involved and educated on the issues impacting people in our sistering partnership region.

### ***III. The Three Pillars of Accompaniment***

We will support the three modes of accompaniment to show our steadfast support for our CRIPDES sistering partnership region.

#### **1. Physical and Moral Accompaniment**

Send delegations from the U.S. to visit, learn from, and build friendships with partnered communities in El Salvador, and invite them to visit and educate U.S. communities on organized tours. Correspond and share reflections via email, phone calls, or letters on a regular basis.

## **2. Financial Accompaniment**

Raise funds for locally-led projects that promote community organizing, civil society, and local development. These SHARE-administered projects are designed and led by the CRIPDES communities, and promote people's ability to create local change for better conditions. They foster: leadership, education and training, organization, widespread participation, women's empowerment, assessment of needs and proposals for solutions, and advocacy with local and national governments. These projects raise the overall development of all the communities in the region. We will work first with SHARE and then with the democratically-elected regional council of CRIPDES, or directiva, in matters related to decision-making, funding, gift-giving, activities planning, etc.

## **3. Advocacy Accompaniment**

Education, mobilization, and lobbying for sustainable improvement of economic and social conditions for the majority poor in El Salvador.

### ***IV. Support for SHARE***

We will support SHARE's grassroots program through an annual membership contribution and a 20% administrative fee incorporated into projects. SHARE in return will provide high quality Grassroots Staff support to our committee and to our sistering region. When possible, we will consider contributions to other SHARE programs such as the Legacy Fund, Sustainer Program and the Local Development program.

*We from the \_\_\_\_\_ community pledge to walk with the people of El Salvador and particularly those in the \_\_\_\_\_ CRIPDES region as they seek sustainable alternatives to poverty and freedom from oppression.*

Signed

Date

\*\*\*\*\*

## **8. Background on El Salvador**

Poverty in El Salvador is perhaps best understood in the context of the testimonies of those who lived and died in the fight for justice. That fight grew out of faith communities decades ago. During the 1970s many in the Catholic Church began to take a “preferential option for the poor”. Many Salvadorans began to form “Base Communities” to study the Bible and reflect on their own reality. Through this process, thousands of poor farmers began to hope that they could build God’s Kingdom on Earth in the form of a more dignified life for the poor.

Originally populated by the Pipil and Lenca Indians, El Salvador was colonized by the Spanish over five hundred years ago. In the centuries that followed, a small land-owning elite held control of the country while the large majority of peasants, or campesinos, worked in deplorable conditions to harvest the major national crops of indigo, coffee and sugarcane. In 1932, a group of indigenous peasants revolted in a quest to gain the right to own land and were brutally massacred by the new military-run government, which almost completely wiped out indigenous culture.

In the 1970's, rural peasants, labor unions, teachers, and student groups began to organize once again to demand their rights through regime after regime of military governments. At that time, El Salvador still had a nearly feudal system of land ownership. Only 2% of the country's population controlled 60% of the arable land. The economy was based on exporting cotton, sugar cane and coffee, and these crops were grown on the very best land. The poor were relegated to grow corn on hillsides, or were given small plots of land on the haciendas where they worked the cash crops. The gross injustices produced by this system created a tension that resulted in citizen education and organizing, met by extreme oppression and violence by ruling powers.

The violent oppression that followed led to a twelve year civil war from 1980-1992 between the FMLN guerrilla forces and the Salvadoran military, which the U.S. supported with an average of a million dollars a day over the course of the war. During the civil war, over 75,000 Salvadorans lost their lives.

Before and during the war, terror reigned, as death squads tortured and killed those who spoke out for justice. A strong actor in the struggle for dignity was Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was known as the voice of the voiceless poor. Archbishop Romero spoke out passionately against the military repression, calling for an end to U.S. military aid to El Salvador. These efforts earned him the love of the people and the hatred of the military. On March 24, 1980, Romero was shot while giving mass. Before his death, Romero said that if he was killed, he would be resurrected in the Salvadoran people.

In 1992, Peace Accords brought an end to the civil war. Important changes were made in El Salvador's political system, which have made it possible for opposition political parties to participate openly in elections and day to day political life. However, the Peace Accords were less successful in addressing the economic roots to the war. While 35,000 landless peasants did receive small parcels of land, the country simultaneously implemented a series of anti- family farm policies that have categorically reduced the possibility for survival for family farmers.

For twenty years, from 1989 until 2009, the far right-wing party ARENA ran the country, implementing neo-liberal policies that would negatively impact the majority of the Salvadoran population and exacerbate the plight of the poor. Today El Salvador is facing higher rates of emigration, violent crime, and economic inequality than ever.

Wealth is more concentrated than ever in El Salvador, with the wealthiest 10% of the population holding 90% of the resources. The Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) signed with the United States in 2005, opened the door for U.S. companies to flood the Salvadoran market with less expensive goods, worsening the agricultural and food security crisis, deepening rural poverty, and causing more migration into urban centers and forcing people out of the country to seek work.

Migration to the United States has increased since the time of the war, and there are now an estimated 2.5 million Salvadorans living in the United States. Gang violence grew as large numbers of Salvadoran immigrants, who had formed gangs in Los Angeles in the early 90's, were deported to El Salvador. Government response to the gang violence was a harsh crack-down on Salvadoran youth, especially those living in poor urban communities.

Intense environmental degradation began with the deforestation of El Salvador under Spanish rule and continues today, particularly through contamination by foreign transnationals, including mining companies. Community resistance to mining has met with violence in the rural department of Cabañas. Two international mining companies, Pacific Rim and Commerce Group have each opened hundred million dollar law suits against the Salvadoran government for not granting them permits to begin gold extraction.

Despite the countless challenges and problems they face, Salvadorans "siguen adelante" or continue forward with great dedication and hope. In 2009, Mauricio Funes took office to become the first leftist president of El Salvador, and in 2014 El Salvador elected FMLN founder and former guerrilla commander Salvador Sánchez Cerén to continue the changes that the Funes administration initiated. While this is seen as a great achievement for the Salvadoran people, the struggle for justice continues on, as not everything can be changed with a new party in office. Yet the spirit of civil war martyrs Oscar Romero, the UCA Jesuits and countless others lives on through the Salvadoran people as they struggle for a more just world.

When SHARE strategizes with our partners in communities and non-governmental organizations, we try to think in terms of structural issues and solutions to those larger problems, rather than charitable responses to short-term crisis. There is a very simple reason for this - if El Salvador does not address these structures that strengthen poverty's hold on the population, poverty will deepen and despair will prosper. Following the example of Romero and the 75,000 martyrs, **SHARE works to be a voice for those who are marginalized in El Salvador so that the answers may come from within.**

## **9. Resource Guide**

**For further information, we recommend:**

**Movies:**

*Innocent Voices.* The Story of Youth Coming of Age during the Civil War in El Salvador. By Hans Rosenberg. Mexico, 2004.

*Return to El Salvador.* This film is the compelling story of vibrant Salvadoran individuals and communities and the intricate geo-political systems that have so profoundly impacted their lives, making this distant war relevant to a current American audience. <http://www.returntoelsalvador.com/>

*Romero.* Starring Raul Julia. Vidmark Entertainment video. 105 minutes

*Roses in December.* The story of Jean Donovan by Ana Carrigan and Bernard Stone. Available from Maryknoll World Productions. Tel. 1-800-227-8523.

*SHARE Video (The).* Produced by the SHARE Foundation. 1997 Available in English and Spanish.

SHARE on Youtube

**Books:**

Benitez, Sandra *Bitter Grounds* (and/or) *The Weight of All Things.* Novels, historical fiction that give the modern history of El Salvador through characters from distinct socio-economic backgrounds.

Berryman, Phillip. *Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics and Revolution in Central America.* Orbis, 1994.

Danner, Mark. *The Massacre at El Mozote.* 1994. Penetrating account of the war and the U.S. through the lens of the El Mozote massacre.

Romero, Oscar A. *The Voice of the Voiceless: The Four Pastoral Letters and Other Statements,* Introductions, commentaries and selection of texts by R. Cardenal, I. Martín-Baró and J. Sobrino. Orbis, 1985. This is the best introduction to Romero's homilies and writings in English.

Swedish, Margaret and Dennis, Marie. *Like grains of Wheat: A Spirituality of Solidarity.* Orbis: 2004.

Wright, Scott. *Promised Land: Death and Life in El Salvador.* Orbis, 1994. Stories of hope and tragedy among the poor during the war in El Salvador.

The Violence of Love, compilations of Oscar Romero quotes

Oscar Romero: Memories in Mosaic, by Maria Lopez Vigil

**Salvadoran Newspapers:**

The first two listed are the most widely circulated newspapers in El Salvador, the third is an alternative news source, and the fourth and fifth are independent, online-only news outlets

The Prensa Grafica: [www.laprensagrafica.com/](http://www.laprensagrafica.com/)

El Diario de Hoy: [www.elsalvador.com/](http://www.elsalvador.com/)

Diario CoLatino: [www.diariocolatino.com/](http://www.diariocolatino.com/)

El Faro: [www.elfaro.net/](http://www.elfaro.net/)

Contrapunto: [www.contrapunto.com.sv/](http://www.contrapunto.com.sv/)

**Websites:**

The SHARE Foundation: [www.share-elsalvador.org](http://www.share-elsalvador.org)

Upsidedown World: [www.upsidedownworld.org](http://www.upsidedownworld.org)

Voices on the Border blog: <http://voiceselsalvador.wordpress.com/>

Tim's El Salvador blog: [luterano.blogspot.com](http://luterano.blogspot.com)

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## **10. Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. What will partnering cost?**

There are different types of costs and contributions associated with partnering, depending on the commitment each Youth Partner decides to make to El Salvador. Here are some rough estimates:

- *Delegations*: Estimated cost is \$80 - \$90 per delegate per night plus airfare to El Salvador
- *Annual Regional Projects Contribution*: \$3,000 - \$20,000 (According to capacity)
- *Annual SHARE Membership Contribution*: (According to capacity)
  - Sustainer Committee: \$300-\$599 annual contribution
  - Supporter Committee: \$600-\$799 annual contribution
  - Companion Committee: \$800-\$999 annual contribution
  - Partnering Committee: \$1,000-\$1,999 annual contribution
  - Alliance Committee: \$2,000+ annual contribution
- *Tours*: Costs for 3-Person Tour: approximately \$1,400 plus airfare (plus costs while in U.S.)

### **2. How long is the commitment for?**

SHARE encourages Sistering Partners to make a commitment of at least five years to build deep, strong relationships. A longer period allows Salvadoran communities feel and see a real commitment from their North American partner and allows Sistering groups to see tangible results of how accompaniment makes a difference for women, youth, families and communities.

### **3. How frequently will we go to El Salvador?**

SHARE encourages committees to send a delegation to El Salvador every year or two. For those years when committees do not send delegations, they are encouraged to consider bringing a tour of two or three Salvadorans from their partnering region to visit the committee. These trips will help renew ties of solidarity and faith as well as help promote friendship and exchange between the US committee and the Salvadoran partnering region.

### **4. How do we communicate with our partnering region? How often?**

Different partners have different mechanisms for communicating with their partnering region. The simplest way to communicate with the region is through your partner regional office. The CRIPDES offices, for the most part, have access to telephones, fax, and email. Through the CRIPDES office, messages may also be sent to specific communities or individuals. You may establish a common email address or chatroom to continue interaction with people you meet in El Salvador. SHARE can also help get correspondence, including letters and photos, to communities.

How frequently a Sistering Partner decides to communicate with the region depends on their decision. We recommend a minimum of monthly or bimonthly communication. Sistering Partners should seek out a proficient Spanish speaker in their local community to help with translation, both for outgoing correspondence to El Salvador, as well as incoming from regional partners.

### **5. What does it mean to partner with a region of communities? Will we be able to form friendships with individuals and communities?**

A few years ago, SHARE took the lead from CRIPDES to broaden sistering partnerships from single communities to whole groups of communities, or regions. SHARE's accompaniment of these regions supports the efforts of more people to become organized leaders, who through faith, persistence, and organization, are able to work for long-term, social change on a structural and local level.

Partnering with a region means supporting both local organizing and leadership formation in many small communities, as well as broad, coordinated efforts at the regional level. This also provides a vehicle to engage in advocacy, to address the concerns of all of the communities in that region. While in El Salvador, Sistering Partners have the opportunity to visit and form friendships with people in individual communities, as well as build ties with youth or women's committees and with CRIPDES regional organizers.

## **6. How do we start a Sistering Relationship?**

Interested groups can start a relationship by talking with the SHARE Grassroots Coordinator and reviewing this discernment guide. If SHARE and the committee both feel that a partnership is a good match, then the next step is to go to El Salvador on a discernment delegation. Upon return, SHARE staff and the discerning group come together to make a final decision. In the end, SHARE hopes to welcome the discerning group as a new member into its family, and to celebrate with a formal ceremony.

## **7. When does the sistering partnership end?**

The question of when to end a relationship is answered through another discernment process, which involves communication with the appropriate SHARE promoter, with SHARE staff, and with the sistering partner in El Salvador. Relationships should close in a formal and celebratory way. Sistering partnerships should begin with a minimum five-year commitment.

## **8. In what ways can SHARE support its U.S. sistering groups?**

SHARE can provide the following forms of support to U.S. sistering partners:

- Organize and coordinate tours (with five months notice) and delegations (with four months notice) from El Salvador. Provide interpretation during delegations.
- Provide support in preparation and planning from the U.S. for tours and delegations, and when possible, accompany for one or more days of a tour.
- Administer, monitor, and provide communication around projects with a broad, multi-community impact, and with a vision for long term solutions to poverty and underdevelopment.
- **Provide ongoing communication** about the partnering region, communities, project participants, and the challenges and successes of development work.
- **Send semester reports** on the progress of the regional projects Youth Partners support, including information on activities, achievements and challenges, as well as photos.
- Support US committees with US-side participation in SHARE-supported advocacy campaigns, in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in El Salvador.
- Help generate ideas for fundraising strategies for committees raising money for delegations, tours, or projects.
- Help facilitate communication between U.S. and Salvadoran Sistering Partners. (U.S. committees should develop a mechanism for translation of letters with Sistering Partners).
- Hold money in accounts for SHARE-administered projects only.

**We invite you to join us on this life-changing journey of  
accompaniment with the Salvadoran people.**