Dear Future Delegate,

**Congratulations!** You are on your way towards an amazing adventure! Whether this is your first trip to El Salvador or you consider yourself a “seasoned” delegate, the delegation experience promises to be inspiring. SHARE El Salvador has a long and successful history of organizing delegations for a wide variety of groups from the U.S. to accompany Salvadorans in their struggle for social and economic justice, and human rights.

In this packet, you will find a detailed description of the delegation experience and SHARE El Salvador, a brief history of El Salvador, frequently asked questions, health and safety information, and other guidelines to help prepare you for the trip. If at any time during this process we can be of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us at delegations@share-elsalvador.org.

Welcome! We are looking forward to this journey with you!

Sincerely,

The SHARE Team
Table of Contents

About SHARE.................................................................3
SHARE’s Accompaniment Philosophy........................................4
How you can join us in accompaniment....................................5
SHARE’s Grassroots Partnering Program..................................6
What is a Delegation?..........................................................7
Frequently Asked Questions..................................................9
Packing Guide.................................................................13
El Salvador Past and Present: A One Page Summary................15
The Sacred Sites: An Introduction.........................................17
Further Resources.............................................................20
About SHARE El Salvador

SHARE El Salvador is an international non-profit solidarity organization with a mission 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 supports the empowerment of historically impoverished and marginalized communities, as they strive to meet both their most immediate needs and construct long-term sustainable solutions to the problems of poverty, underdevelopment and social injustice. SHARE has also hosted delegations from the U.S. for nearly 35 years and fostered a dynamic partnering program where a relationship of accompaniment is created with communities in the U.S. and El Salvador.

SHARE is not a charity organization nor do we sponsor educational tourism. Our relationship with the people of El Salvador is one of accompaniment and establishing a global network of justice-focused individuals. SHARE is about systemic change. Our advocacy program challenges corporate globalization with sustainable community development alternatives. This is the reason we have been able to serve the communities in El Salvador for nearly 35 years. We have great local partners, friends, staff and supporters.

All of SHARE’s work incorporates five 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**: Strengthen the capacity, especially of women and youth, to become democratic leaders and empower others from their communities.
- **Environmental Sustainability**: Advocate and raise awareness about environmental justice and the impacts of 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 have suffered.

These core values guide SHARE’s work in the following four program areas:

**Grassroots Partnerships**: An exciting initiative driven by long-term, international relationships of mutual accompaniment. Partnering through SHARE means building relationships based on respect and solidarity to walk side-by-side on the road to more just and equitable relations between the U.S. and El Salvador.

**Community Development**: These projects support organized rural communities and grassroots organizations as they organize and empower people to seek long-term, sustainable change. The projects we support emphasize formal and informal education, gender equality, alternative economic initiatives, and community organizing and advocacy in search of viable models of sustainable development for El Salvador’s rural sector and beyond.
**Advocacy:** SHARE advocates for environmental justice, sustainable rural development and human rights at the local, national, and international level, supporting Salvadoran counterparts and engaging those in the United States in this work.

**Major Delegations:** SHARE’s Major Delegations are a unique opportunity to walk with Salvadorans as they remember their past and face current struggles. Delegates learn first-hand about El Salvador’s history, present challenges, and hopes for the future while building relationships with people, communities and organizations working for change.

❖ **SHARE’s Accompaniment Philosophy**

SHARE has always focused on accompanying or walking with Salvadorans. A key part of accompaniment is recognizing that Salvadorans are the protagonists of their own destinies. We are not in El Salvador to tell Salvadorans what to do, but to be in a relationship of solidarity: listening, witnessing, conversing, supporting. SHARE has literally walked with the people of El Salvador in three important ways.

We call them the **three pillars of accompaniment:**

- **Physical, Spiritual, and Moral Accompaniment:** Building lasting relationships between communities in El Salvador and the United States by creating opportunities such as delegations and tours for them to share experiences, joys, and struggles.

- **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.

- **Financial Accompaniment via projects:** We believe communities also need financial support as they seek sustainable alternatives to poverty. Through regional projects we support community organizations’ efforts toward leadership development, citizen participation, environmental sustainability, and women’s empowerment.

SHARE delegations reinforce this model of accompaniment by providing U.S. citizens and Salvadorans the opportunity to interact directly. Our goal is not to show you El Salvador, but to offer an environment in which you witness the Salvadoran reality by walking beside Salvadorans as they share with you their analysis and vision. As you prepare for your experience in El Salvador, we encourage you to explore this philosophy and reflect on the different natures of charity and justice. Participation in the delegation is based on the desire to listen and understand problems without seeking to immediately resolve them.
We invite you to become a SHARE Visionary - to participate directly in the creation of a new model for development. Your monthly contribution will provide hardworking Salvadorans the support they need to overcome the challenges they face. We need your pledge to contribute a monthly gift to SHARE. We make it easy by setting up an automatic monthly deduction from your credit card!

$50 will help **one group of youth participate in community councils** to organize and carry out historic memory activities.

$35 will help **facilitate a bi-monthly gathering with family members of the disappeared**, organized by human rights coalition Pro-Memoria.

$20 will help **youth leaders strengthen youth organization** through workshops focused on health, leadership, and politics.

$10 will help **mobilize one violence survivor to march** on the International Day of Non-Violence Against Women.

¡Sí – YES!

I’d/We’d Like to Sustain SHARE’s Work
For Restorative Justice and Historic Memory in El Salvador!

Name:__________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Address:_________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
Telephone:__________________________    Email:_________________ ________________________________________________________
Visa/master card # ______________________________________ Expiration Date __________________________________________
Pledge:   $50   $35    $20   $10 other $ ________________ monthly | quarterly | annually

Please mail to:
SHARE El Salvador 2425 * College Ave * Berkeley, CA 94704
510-848-8487

Or visit our website share-elsalvador.org, click ‘donate’ then select your preferred recurring gift frequency.
**SHARE’s Grassroots Partnering Program**

In partnering relationships, SHARE invites groups in the U.S. such as parishes, congregations, social justice committees, high schools, youth groups, and universities to join us by partnering with groups of organized but impoverished Salvadoran communities, or “regions,” in one of the four geographical areas where our local partner, CRIPDES works. Partnering with CRIPDES through SHARE allows groups from the U.S. to form relationships with individuals and communities in the region, and support broad-based regional organizing for long-term change. Participating in a partnering relationship means:

- Coming to El Salvador on **delegations** to visit partnering regions and communities, learn about their daily reality, build deep relationships, and learn about key themes or visit important sites related to El Salvador’s history and current challenges.

- Inviting Salvadorans to the U.S. on **tours** to share their work and experiences and learn about your reality

- Fundraising for regional **projects** that support community organizing, leadership training, and sustainable development

- Participating in **advocacy** efforts to create systemic changes in the U.S. and El Salvador that will improve the lives of El Salvador’s majority

**Nothing compares to hearing the life story and work of a Salvadoran dedicated to justice in their own voice.**

CRIPDES was formed in 1984 to assist refugees, displaced, and other victims of human rights abuses from the countryside. SHARE has worked with CRIPDES since this time. Today CRIPDES works with a base of more than 300 rural communities to facilitate community and regional organizing and promote development, human rights protection, access to basic services and improved living conditions, and increased opportunities for work and education. SHARE partners with four of the six CRIPDES regions: the CCR in Chalatenango, UCRES in Northern San Salvador and La Libertad, CRIPDES in San Vicente, and CRIPDES SUR in La Libertad.
In each of the four CRIPDES regions SHARE partners with, we support a youth leadership development project and a women’s leadership development project. The youth leadership projects include partial high school scholarships, youth assemblies, and trainings in leadership, community organizing, public speaking, the national reality, and nonviolence. Youth participants also make a commitment to participation in their communities through youth committees, community councils, literacy trainings or other community work. The women’s projects consist of economic initiatives like community gardens, microcredit loans, and seed funds combined with trainings in these areas as well as in community organization, participatory democracy, and mental health.

CRIPDES is an exciting local partner because:

- CRIPDES is about as grassroots as it gets. Members of the regional teams come from the communities they represent, and are elected to their positions.
- CRIPDES regional teams accompany communities in coming together around issues impacting the whole region and raising a united voice, allowing for a broader impact than one community could have on its own.
- Supporting projects at the regional level allows members of many communities in the region to participate, creating a more equal distribution of development opportunities.
- CRIPDES regional teams help identify key advocacy issues around which delegations and partnering groups can take action.

❖ **What is a SHARE Delegation?**

Delegations give you a chance to directly experience the reality of life in El Salvador. Delegates meet with Salvadoreans working for women’s rights, environmental protection, commemoration and justice for victims of human rights abuses during the war and today, and other ongoing struggles. Through these meetings, delegates learn about the road that has led to today’s economic, social, and political situation along with what people are doing today for a better El Salvador tomorrow. Delegations visit organized rural communities, share in daily community life, and experience local, and sustainable development efforts firsthand. Delegates also experience Salvadoran culture through exposure to new food, the language, artisan crafts, and spending time in the natural surroundings of this beautiful country. SHARE Delegations are a once in a lifetime chance for North Americans to visit El Salvador, “El Rincón Mágico” or the “Magical Corner” of Central America, build relationships of solidarity with the Salvadoran people, and explore ongoing forms of accompaniment.
Activities can include:

- Visits to sacred sites in San Salvador such as Archbishop Romero’s home and the chapel where he was killed, the Monument to Truth and Memory, a civilian war memorial, and the Rose Garden dedicated to the Jesuit Martyrs at the University of Central America.
- Overnight home stay in an organized rural community. Meet with the community council, tour the community, and accompany host families in their daily activities.
- Salvadorans from the rural community may accompany the delegation throughout their time in the city.
- Speakers on the Salvadoran national reality.
- Visits to cooperatives or grassroots organizations involved in local development and the creation of alternative economic models.
- Meetings with organizations that defend human rights and struggle for justice in El Salvador today around issues such as women’s and youth rights and environmental justice.
- Learning about the devastating effects of the Salvadoran civil war and current efforts to build peace and democracy.
- Opportunities to participate in advocacy issues of the day, such as meetings with the U.S. Embassy or visits to areas affected by mining.
- Visits with Christian Base Communities as well as opportunities to learn about and participate in Liberation Theology.
- A Youth Exchange between the delegation and the Salvadoran youth from the sistering region.
Frequently Asked Questions

What is the cost of the trip?

Below you can see a basic outline of a delegation budget. This price DOES NOT include airfare. For a 10-day delegation with 10 participants, the administration fee is $370 per person. For delegations lasting longer than 10 days OR with 7 or less people, the administration fee is $410 per person. There is an additional group cost of $170 per day for coordination and facilitation (translation). The remaining cost per delegate varies depending on trip activities (food, transportation, lodging, etc). All fees are to be paid to the SHARE Berkeley office at least one month before the trip. SHARE will create a specialized budget for your group based on your activities. Please consult your US Organizer for details.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SHARE Foundation Delegation Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SHARE Administration Fee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination and Facilitation (Translation) Fee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lodging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidentallyals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GROUP TOTAL</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INDIVIDUAL TOTAL</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have heard that there are high levels of crime in El Salvador, will I be safe?

While researching El Salvador, or speaking about the trip to friends or family, you may have heard that El Salvador is currently experiencing a high level of violence, specifically gang violence. Recent reports indicate that violence and crime, both random and organized, have risen in El Salvador since the signing of the peace accords in 1992. As a matter of fact, El Salvador currently faces some of the highest levels of violence in Latin America. National studies indicate that the root causes of the current situation include extreme poverty related to ten years of neo-liberal economics, lack of programs to support reinsertion into society for people after the war, too many guns, and (in spite of reforms) a still-corrupt judicial system.

**Given this context, we take our commitment to safety very seriously. SHARE has taken every precaution to ensure that participants avoid dangerous situations and/or environments. We have the benefit of over 35 years of experience working with Salvadoran communities, and the connections, wisdom and mutual respect that comes along with over a quarter century of accompaniment.** Ultimately, the most important in your safety is your own awareness and adherence to safety issues. Please keep reading for more information about our safety guidelines and expectations.

We assure you that on the ground we are explicit in our security orientation, and have never had any serious incidents to date. The targets of violent crime are generally not foreigners and the same safety measures you use in major cities in the US can apply. What you will notice is that Salvadorans’ sensitivity to violent crime is less acute than that of North Americans. We tend to be more shocked than they are when we see, for example, armed guards on every corner.
Female travelers should also be advised that machismo, or sexism, is a significant problem in El Salvador. Currently, progressive feminist groups are working to combat this issue. Additionally, those of Anglo descent are seen on television and movies as both wealthy and promiscuous, therefore the specific impression that precedes white women is not pretty. Be prepared to be whistled at, spoken to in a derogatory manner, or just “scoped out” on a regular basis. **We suggest that women dress more conservatively than they might in the US, i.e., avoid short shorts (knee length or capris are fine), short skirts and revealing tops and ignore any unwanted.**

### What if I get sick?

Part of the excitement of experiencing another culture is sampling the wonderful and exotic foods that the country has to offer. When you return you will surely be raving about El Salvador’s most typical food, *pupusas* (a corn or rice tortilla generally stuffed with beans, cheese or squash). However, exotic foods can sometimes disrupt our body’s “standard operating procedures” and can cause upset stomachs. Also, as sanitation and hygiene standards in El Salvador are not what they are in the US, certain precautions MUST be taken. Some of the things that you can do to keep yourself healthy include washing your hands frequently, only eating fruits and vegetables that are peeled or cooked, and, perhaps the most important of all: drinking a lot of water. Preventative aids are listed in the packing list, and further precautions will be addressed at the in-country orientation.

More often than not, most digestive issues can be solved with rest and re-hydration. If you do not feel well, it is important that you communicate that to your delegation leader; sometimes taking Imodium or Cipro can do more harm than help. In the case that medical attention is warranted, SHARE will coordinate appropriate care. If doctor or hospital visits are necessary, the individual will be expected to cover the cost of the visit, which in El Salvador is generally $20-25. If you would like, you may investigate travel insurance with your current health provider or separate student health insurance coverage may also be available. Again, doctor and/or hospital visits are not typical, although a little stomach upset isn’t abnormal.

### How can I prepare for the trip?

Your participation in the delegation begins long before the plane leaves the ground. You may be asked to attend meetings, participate in group activities, and assist in fund-raising efforts. Be open to reflecting upon political, economic, and faith-based issues from a variety of perspectives. This would also be a great opportunity for you to share your enthusiasm and ask for support from friends and family. You might ask those closest to you about their experiences with volunteer projects, international travel and/or cultural explorations. You could talk with them about how they have learned to deal with being out of their comfort zone. Share with them what, to you, is exciting about new experiences. This is an opportunity for you to extend your experience, to be a teacher as well as a student. Talking with family and friends pre-trip will also help pave the way for you to share your experiences and stories with people once you return.
You can also do a little background research! Having prior knowledge of the issues facing Salvadorans and their lives today can help you ask better questions and have deeper interactions with the people you meet. Read the SHARE El Salvador Resource Packet for more background on El Salvador’s current social, economic, and political reality and stories of some of our partners. Visit the SHARE website and blog and check out some of the issues, struggles, triumphs, joys, and stories of Salvadorans today. If you have a chance, come together as a delegation group to share what you’ve learned! Above all, we encourage you to come with an open mind, ready to enjoy new foods, explore new customs, live in close quarters with community members and other participants, and experience rustic conditions in communities. A positive attitude is key to having a successful – even life-changing experience.

**What will be expected of me while in El Salvador?**

In addition to preparing for the delegation experience, there are a few other expectations that SHARE will ask of all participants. The following guidelines reflect SHARE’s commitment to safeguard each group’s security. We take this commitment very seriously. We seek to create a secure environment as you accompany your Salvadoran brothers and sisters in their struggle for a just and democratic society. We will inform you of current threats to safety while at the same time try to keep in perspective the reasons we are here and what we are trying to do in El Salvador.

![SHARE delegation leader conducting orientation](image)

Your SHARE delegation leader will conduct an orientation upon entering the country. We ask all participants to make sure that they review and understand in-country guidelines, especially pertaining to health and safety, and that they take appropriate steps to keep themselves safe and healthy.

![Proper behavior expectations](image)

It is very important that while in El Salvador, you adhere to proper behavior as a member of a group. This implies very basic expectations such as listening and following the instructions and requests of the organizer and SHARE staff, being mindful of the rest of the group with regard to schedule, and staying with the group during activities. Further, you should be prepared to gracefully handle experiences and realities radically different from your own.

![Accompaniment Philosophy](image)

We ask that participants remain mindful of SHARE’s Accompaniment Philosophy and do their best to interact with the Salvadoran community in this capacity.

![Salvadoran law](image)

As is standard for visiting any foreign country, participants should abide by Salvadoran law. This includes, but is not limited to laws regarding consumption of alcohol and drugs. Participants should also be aware of a law which prohibits foreigners from participating in Salvadoran politics- this even prohibits wearing politically flavored shirts or hats.
It is important not to be too shy! Especially if you are trying to learn Spanish, the best way to take advantage of being in El Salvador is to initiate conversation, ask respectful questions, and express yourself. Salvadorans really appreciate your efforts to communicate, no matter how imperfect your Spanish may be.

Finally, communication is key! It is vital that you communicate any special needs (dietary, physical, or emotional) in the application form, as well as talk to your SHARE coordinator about any issues that come up along the way.

What if I want to bring gifts for the communities/families I visit?

In keeping with the spirit of our solidarity model, we discourage participants from bringing large or extravagant gifts. What would be appropriate, although by no means mandatory, is to offer a simple memento or a meaningful token of your visit. Gifts that families often appreciate are symbolic gifts such as photos of you, or perhaps a simple cultural souvenir such as a postcard representing your state or town. If your group has decided to bring some sort of donation for the community that you will be staying in, please inform SHARE in advance so that the donation can be distributed in a way that fits within the accompaniment model.

How do I stay in contact with family and/or friends while I am in El Salvador?

Due to the nature of the delegation and communication issues in El Salvador, it may be difficult for you to contact friends/family from El Salvador. There may be internet access in the guesthouse, but it will likely be slow and limited. As the SHARE team, we assure you that you will be in good hands. Keep in mind, also, that if there is an emergency situation and someone needs to contact you right away, they can call the SHARE Office at (011)503-2260-4325. Keep in mind that this is only for emergencies, and that it will be difficult for you to receive calls during the delegation.

On behalf of all of us here at SHARE, we thank you for joining us in this important part of solidarity. We are looking forward to the role that you will play in building a new El Salvador.

Warm Regards,

The SHARE Team
Packing Guide

As bags are sometimes lost en route, be sure to pack two changes of clothes, important documents, medicine, toiletries, and your camera in a carry-on bag. It is also important to have a smaller bag to pack for the one or two night home-stay. You should bring a sleep sack or a light blanket and sheet for the home-stay as well.

Documents
- Passport, plus a photocopy of the first page of passport*
- Money belt or other means of carrying valuables safely

Clothing
Weather will be hot and humid (80-90 degrees and sticky) in most regions of El Salvador. Bring a long-sleeved sweater or light jacket for chilly evenings and overly air-conditioned planes. Rainy season begins in May and ends in September-October, so during that time you should expect some rain and bring a light poncho and shoes that can handle lots of mud.

For meetings, dress should be neat and clean, but not fancy. Skirts, nice jeans, cotton pants or long shirts and a blouse/shirt are fine. During the rural home stay, the shower may be a bucket shower out in the open, so you should bring a swimsuit or tank top and shorts you would feel comfortable showering in

- Lightweight skirts, pants, knee length shorts or capris, dresses, shirts, etc. (Cotton is best, jeans are fine -- just hot)*
- One nice outfit (for formal interviews, religious services, etc.)*
- Walking shoes*
- Sturdy Sandals
- Flip Flops (for bedtime, showers, etc.)
- Rain gear (light poncho)
- Sun glasses and sun hat
- Change of underclothes for each day (+ one)*
- Plastic bag for dirty clothes
- Bathing suit or clothes to shower in
- Long sleeved shirt or light jacket

Equipment and toiletries
- Light blanket and sheet, sleep sack or light sleeping bag*
- Aspirin/Tylenol -- your preferred headache reliever.
- Pepto Bismol (tablets travel more easily than liquid)*
- Sun screen*
- Bandages/first aid material
- Mosquito repellent with DEET and a cortisone cream (for bites)*
- Roll of toilet paper/packets of soft tissue (important but can be purchased in ES)
- Personal hygiene products* (toothpaste, toothbrush, soap, shampoo)
- Combs, brushes, small mirrors, etc.
- Towel and washcloth
- Hand sanitizer to carry in your purse/pocket/knapsack
- Anti- Anti-malarial and/or other prophylactic medications
- Anti-malarial and/or other prophylactic medications
- Any other prescription medicine (be sure it is in your name and in the original packaging)
- Three zip-lock bags of various sizes (to keep things dust free and to store soiled items)
- Water Bottle*
- Flashlight

*Starred items are absolutely necessary.
Optional

☐ Your favorite munchies -- granola, candy bars, raisins, crackers, gum -- energy food. (We may not be able to stop to eat often enough to please all appetites, so be prepared!)

☐ Lip balm (with sunscreen)

☐ Comfortable shoulder bag or knapsack

☐ Spanish dictionary or Spanish phrase sheet

☐ Leisure reading

☐ Penknife

☐ Ear plugs or cotton

☐ Notebook and journal

☐ Pens and pencils

☐ Camera

☐ IMAGES OF HOME (Pictures of you and your family, your community/church family and pictures of yourself to share with your host family during the homestay)

*** Additional Advice ***

Pack light! Multi-functional clothing is best. If you think you can live without it for a week, you probably can.

Use your judgment! Please bring whatever medications you need to keep yourself healthy in an unfamiliar environment. For example, if you know you have a delicate stomach, please bring extra Pepto. If you are lactose intolerant, please bring extra medication that addresses this issue.

Please plan ahead and double check! We prefer not to dedicate delegation time to shopping for things that you can bring with you. That said, forgotten essentials (sunscreen, insect repellant, batteries, etc.) are readily available, though more expensive in El Salvador.

DISEASE INFORMATION

Please consult your physician or local travel clinic for recommendations. The following information is taken from the Center for Disease Control website:

RECOMMENDED IMMUNIZATIONS
Update diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis, measles/mumps/rubella (MMR), varicella (chickenpox), polio vaccines, and your yearly flu shot as appropriate to age and date of last dose. Hepatitis A and Typhoid vaccines are strongly recommended.

SUGGESTED/OPTIONAL IMMUNIZATIONS
Yellow Fever: Yellow fever is not present in El Salvador; however, a certificate of vaccination against yellow fever is required for persons over six months of age coming from infected areas. The U.S. is not an infected area. Cholera: Cholera is present in this country. Cholera vaccine is not required or recommended according to international health regulations (WHO) or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Cholera vaccine provides incomplete protection. Strict adherence to food and water precautions lowers risk. Malaria: Risk of malaria is present in rural areas below 600 meters only. Risk is increased during the rainy season. We will advise your US Organizer if you will be visiting a high-risk malaria area.

SPECIAL ADVISORIES
Hepatitis B virus is common among inhabitants of El Salvador. The virus is transmitted from person to person through blood contaminated needles or sexual contact. Vaccination is recommended for persons providing health care and those who plan extended residence in the area.

There have been outbreaks of Dengue Fever and Chikungunya, both mosquito-born viruses. There are no immunizations except to protect against mosquito bites with long sleeves and mosquito spray with DEET.

For further information contact Center for Disease Control at: http://www.cdc.gov/travel/camerica.htm
El Salvador: Past and Present

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. 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.

After the signing of the peace accords in 1992, the FMLN was transformed into a political party and the former security forces were dissolved, and a new National Civilian Police force created. Thousands of refugees returned to their homes or to newly populated communities to begin to rebuild their lives. For twenty years, the far right-wing party ARENA ran the country, creating neo-liberal policies that negatively impacted the majority of the Salvadoran population. Immigration to the United States increased with an estimated three million Salvadorans living in the United States to date; in 1990 there were only half a million.

Gang violence also increased as large numbers of Salvadoran immigrants who had fled during the war joined the Los Angeles gangs, the 18th Street and MS-13. With change in U.S. deportation law, many gang members were deported back to post-war El Salvador where they spread their gangs and territories. Now they have established a whole network involved in violent and criminal activity. Government response to the gang violence was a harsh crackdown on Salvadoran youth, especially those living in poor urban communities. A gang truce was signed in early 2012, dropping the levels of violence but then dissolved in early 2014. In August of 2014, the gangs reinstated the second phase of the gang truce, promising to reduce threats and violence.

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, increasing the agricultural crisis and deepening rural poverty.

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, particularly in the rural department of Cabañas.
International mining company Pacific Rim (now Oceana Gold) has opened a $301 million lawsuit against the Salvadoran government for not granting them permits to begin gold extraction.

Working for women's rights and empowerment also continues to be a challenge. The Salvadoran women's movement won a major victory on November 25th, 2010 with the unanimous passage of the Law for a Life Free of Violence Against Women.

Despite many challenges, 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. The peaceful transition of power in 2009 was huge for Salvadoran society, as one of the contributing factors to the war was that people could not create change through elections due to blatant fraud. Since the 1992 Peace Accords, elections have only become increasingly transparent and democratic, through numerous reforms, and in part with presence from national and international observers. This was seen as a great achievement for the Salvadoran people, but the struggle for justice continues on, as not everything can be changed with a new party in office. Funes implemented a number of social reforms, designed to combat inequality. Such programs include abolishing public healthcare fees, the Ciudad Mujer program (providing services to women), and distributing property titles to many families.

Again in 2014, the left won the presidency after a run-off election with former guerrilla commander Salvador Sánchez Cerén as president. He attributes his search for social justice and improving communities to his humble roots. He was a primary school teacher for ten years. During the war, he was appointed to the position of a Commander in the FMLN. Since the Peace Accords, he has worked the formal political sphere, and was sworn in as Vice-President in 2009. Sánchez Cerén has stated that the “three pillars” of his administration are employment, security, and education. Among his proposals for increasing employment include sponsoring a public development bank and the promotion of important industries. He also proposes to increase funding for police technologies, as well as promote anti-drug abuse campaigns, and training community peace officers. He has expressed his desire for alternative development models (such as those seen in left-wing governments in South America). His Vice-President is Oscar Ortiz, the exceedingly popular former mayor of Santa Tecla.

The spirits of civil war martyrs Oscar Romero, the UCA Jesuits and countless others live on through the Salvadoran people as they struggle for a more just world.
The Sacred Sites: An Introduction

All Delegations visit most if not all the main sacred sites in El Salvador. The sacred sites are places that commemorate people who dedicated their lives to working for justice and human rights and were killed because of it.

Divina Providencia: The Chapel

The Chapel at the Divina Providencia Hospital is the site where Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero was assassinated. The “exploding” bullet went directly into his aorta, killing him upon impact. The assassination occurred when he was celebrating communion during a sunset mass on Monday March 24, 1980. His “crime” was being a prophet of the truth from the perspective of the gospel. Many of the wealthy and powerful in El Salvador felt threatened by Monsignor Romero, who criticized their policies of exploitation and the repression they unleashed on the poor and the organized. Because of his courageous stand in favor of the marginalized majority of the Salvadoran population, Romero was known as the “voice of the voiceless”. He was murdered one month and two days after celebrating his third year as Archbishop of San Salvador and a day after he pronounced his most widely known homily, in which he exhorted soldiers, poor men themselves, “I ask you, I beg you, I order you in the name of God, cease the repression.”

Divina Providencia: The “Casita”

The Carmelite sisters who run the Divina Providencia hospital for cancer patients had this small house built for Monsignor Romero as a surprise birthday present. He lived in the casita during his last years. He explicitly chose to live at the cancer hospital rather than another, more luxurious residence, in order to be closer to the poor and the suffering. At the “casita” visitors can see his room, the bloodstained clothes he was wearing when he was shot, messages of gratitude from people who have received miracles from Monsignor Romero, pictures, and paintings from popular artists.

The Crypt at the National Cathedral

Monsignor Romero’s remains lie in a crypt in the basement of the Cathedral, in downtown San Salvador. Romero’s Sunday mass, held in the Crypt, was broadcast via radio and could be heard in almost every town and community throughout El Salvador. His homilies denounced all types of injustice and repression carried out by the government, the “security” forces and the death squads during those years. His funeral was held in front of the Cathedral on March 30, 1980, and ten of thousands of people from all across the country came to say goodbye to their Pastor. The funeral became a massacre when government snipers attacked the multitude from atop the surrounding buildings. You can see the National Palace, for example, from which several rounds were fired. People tried to take refuge in the Cathedral, while others ran away to escape, but many died either from gunshot wounds or as a result of the trampling that day. Among the most symbolic photos of the funeral are the piles of shoes that were left behind as they fell off people’s feet during their flight. In 2005, Monseñor Romero was given a complete funeral, at which time the Crypt was remodeled, and Monseñor Romero was moved to his current tomb.
SACRED SITES AT THE JESUIT UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL AMERICA (UCA)

On November 16, 1989, the Atlacatl Battalion assassinated six Jesuit Priests and two women who worked for them (a mother and daughter). The majority of the battalion trained at the School of the Americas, a U.S. military school implicated in training many of the principal intellectual and material authors of grave human rights abuses throughout Latin America. The killers entered the university campus and dormitories of the Jesuits during the FMLN (guerilla army) “Final Offensive,” using it as a cover to execute the Jesuits, who had been threatened with such a fate on radio talk shows for days prior. The Jesuits were known as strong promoters of dialogue and peace negotiations between the Government and the FMLN guerrilla forces, and frequently denounced human rights abuses and structural injustice in El Salvador. The Jesuits also wrote and spoke about liberation theology, and were seen as intellectual animators of the liberation theology movement and struggle for change in El Salvador. It was this leadership that led the Jesuits to be killed execution style, with a single bullet to the back of the head.

The Rose Garden
The Jesuit Priests were martyred in the Rose Garden, next to the Jesuit men's dormitories, early on the morning of November 16, 1989. The two women were martyred in one of the dormitories, where they had taken refuge for the night. Obdulio Ramos, husband and father of the women, planted the first roses. Since then, thousands of pilgrims have found strength, light, and hope there.

Martyrs Museum
Dedicated to the martyrs of El Salvador and beyond, the museum displays many personal objects of Monsignor Romero, the UCA martyrs, and the Maryknoll and Ursuline women religious. You will also find personal items of Father Rutilio Grande and the two men assassinated alongside him, including items of clothes they were wearing at the time of their murder on March 12, 1977. Rutilio Grande, a Salvadoran Jesuit, was a close personal friend of Archbishop Romero and his death deeply affected Romero, contributing to his transformation. There is also a permanent exhibition of pictures and tributes to the UCA, El Salvador, Central America and world martyrs.

Jesucristo Libertador Chapel
The Jesuits rest here, alongside a poem a close friend dedicated to them. The Chapel is a pilgrimage site. Fourteen drawings by Salvadoran artist Roberto Huezo hang on the back wall, representing the Salvadoran people in the Stations of the Cross. Behind the altar, a cross and two painting depict the life and works of Monseñor Romero, created by the famous Salvadoran artist Fernando Llort, whose painting style has become the popular Salvadoran style for painting wood crafts. On one of the sidewalls, a painting portrays the Jesuits and women in the sky alongside a crucified Jesus, while the wealthy and military officers gloat below.
Posters Room

A collection of commemoration posters of the different anniversaries of Archbishop Romero, the UCA martyrs and others such as Martin Luther King decorate the walls of the poster room. Some of them have been designed by at the UCA; others come from other parts of the world. You can even find one created by SHARE. It is a unique collection demonstrating many peoples’ care and devotion. Here too are photo albums with graphic pictures taken the day of the assassination of the Jesuit martyrs and the two women.

MONUMENT TO MEMORY AND TRUTH

In 1993, the United Nations Truth Commission published its report “From Madness to Hope” on the Salvadoran Civil War. The commission urged the Salvadoran government to work in concrete ways to facilitate moral and economic recovery for the victims of wartime human rights violations. One specific recommendation was to construct a monument with the names of all those killed during the Civil War as a way to never forget those who lost their lives.

This recommendation never got official support from the ARENA governments, who together with the Army and Death Squads were found responsible for over 90% of the violations mentioned in the Truth Commission report. When it became apparent that the Salvadoran government had no plans to build such a monument, non-governmental human rights and civil society organizations like CODEFAM formed a committee called the "Pro-Monument for the Civilian Victims of Human Rights Abuses Committee." SHARE accompanied the entire process of planning and constructing the Monument – from helping seek out possible designs to sponsoring María Julia Hernández, director of the Archdiocese’s human rights office to do a promotional tour.

On Saturday December 6th, 2003, the Monument to Memory and Truth was inaugurated at Parque Cuscatlan in San Salvador. The monument consists of a black granite wall, 85 meters long, containing approximately 25,000 names of children, women and men who were disappeared, massacred or assassinated during the Civil War, principally by the so called “security” forces of the military and the death squads. In March 2008 an additional 3,000 names were inscribed in the wall, along with a list of over 200 massacres carried out in the 1970s and 80s, and a plaque dedicated to the anonymous victims of the war. In March 2013 the monument was declared National Patrimony and an UNESCO Cultural Heritage Site, with a plaque designating it a protected site in the case of armed conflict.

The wall created a space for the relatives of the civilian war victims – the disappeared, tortured and assassinated – to visit and pay tribute to their martyrs, a place where they could take flowers, remember and honor their dead. The names represent those victims whose deaths had been reported and could be verified, but the Monument stands ready to speak the names of over 75,000 dead and some 10,000 disappeared that are commonly recognized to be more accurate figures of the victims of El Salvador’s reign of terror. This wall is a space for us all to gather, embrace the past and dignify the lives of El Salvador’s martyrs and their families.
Additional Resources on El Salvador

* Denotes resources highly recommended by SHARE staff

SHARE Resources:
The SHARE website: www.share-elsalvador.org
SHARE’s blog: http://www.share-elsalvador.org/category/blog
SHARE’s Facebook: www.facebook.com/SHAREelsalvador
SHARE YouTube channel: http://www.youtube.com/user/SHAREFoundationES
SHARE Twitter: https://twitter.com/SHAREelsalvador

Books: Nonfiction
Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections, by Jon Sobrino
Hearing the Cry of the Poor: Jesuit Priests, El Salvador, 1989, by Ron Hansen
Oscar Romero: Memories in Mosaic, by Maria Lopez Vigil*
Salvador, by Joan Didion
Promised Land: Death and Life in El Salvador, by Scott Wright
Romero: A Life, by James R. Brockman
The Massacre at El Mozote, by Mark Danner*
The Violence of Love, compilations of Oscar Romero quotes*

Books: Fiction
Harvest of Cain, by Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer
One Day of Life, by Manlio Argueta*
The Weight of All Things, by Sandra Benitez

Movies
Enemies of War, PBS Special
Voces Inocentes (Innocent Voices) 2004
Romero, 1989
Roses in December, The story of Jean Donovan 1982
Return to El Salvador, A Documentary About Life After Civil War, 2010
El Cielo Abierto/The Open Sky, documentary 2010
Monseñor: The Last Journey of Oscar Romero, 2011

Websites
Alternative news about Latin America: www.upsidedownworld.org

Blogs
Voices on the Border blog: http://voiceselsalvadorwordpress.com/
Tim’s El Salvador blog: http://luterano.blogspot.com/

News in Spanish: Salvadoran Newspapers
El Faro (online newsource): www.elfaro.net/
Contrapunto (online newsource): www.contrapunto.com.sv/
Diario CoLatino: www.diariocolatino.com/
The Prensa Grafica: www.laprensagrafica.com/