

## October 30 – Reformation



Today we begin a 35-day journey with the Lutheran Church of El Salvador. We start with Reformation, the time at which we are reminded of Martin Luther issuing his Ninety-five Theses in Wittenberg and beginning the Protestant Reformation, then we travel through Thanksgiving and up to the beginning of Advent.

The purpose of this journey is to raise awareness in our congregation of the struggles and joys of ministry in the Lutheran Church of El Salvador. Churches and pastors there face struggles much different from those in the United States and also deal with many of the same issues that our pastors face. While pastors try to lead their people against seemingly insurmountable odds, they are rarely paid anything, and when they are paid it is quite little. They sacrifice their time, their gifts, and sometimes their own money to pay the rent for their church buildings. Occasionally they have even given their lives in their work of building God's kingdom.

The Greater Milwaukee Synod of the ELCA has established an Endowment Fund for pastoral support. The goal is to raise two million dollars so that the interest that is earned on this principal is available to offer salaries to these pastors. If at any time during this journey you feel led to give to this endowment fund, you can give through your church to the Salvadoran Pastoral Endowment Fund.

However, the emphasis of our journey is not on raising money. It is on allowing ourselves to be reformed and transformed, so that we are individually better Christians who are aware of the world around us, so that together we make up a better church which is concerned with the lives of people outside of our own collective self-interest.

Welcome to the journey. Please use the resources which have been prepared by the Synod El Salvador Committee to engage in as many ways as you are comfortable; through worship, personal devotions, group Bible study, or wherever the Spirit leads you.

## November 6 – All Saints

All Saints (November 1 or the first Sunday in November) is a day of remembrance for the saints, who are defined in the New Testament as all Christian believers of every time and place. We celebrate the communion of saints as we remember the dead, both of the Church universal and of our local congregations. Ironically, today is also the first anniversary of the martyrdom of a clergy couple in El Salvador.

Francisco Carrillo and his wife, Jesús de Carrillo, were both shot to



death as they left a service they had just conducted at the Montes de Pensberg Lutheran Church in the municipality of Jayaque, in La Libertad. According to *NoticiaCristiana.com*, three young men approached the couple as they exited the church and then opened fire. The young men then

fled. The motivation behind the assassination is unclear, although some church representatives suspect that they may have been targeted because of their work in defence of the poor and on human rights. Church officials have called for a thorough investigation.

The assassination has left Christians in the country saddened, shocked and deeply concerned about the situation in their country. Many Christians in El Salvador are committed to the positive transformation of their country, and are working on issues involving justice, political reform, and human rights. This can often put them directly in the line of fire. The Lutheran Bishop Medardo Gómez has asked the international Christian community to pray for this situation and the future of El Salvador. Please join with us and our brothers and sisters in El Salvador in praying for comfort and healing for the children and other relatives as well as the church of Pastors Francisco and Jesus de Carrillo; for peace and justice to be firmly established in El Salvador; and for an end to the violence which has taken so many lives. Please also ask God to protect those who are taking a stand for human rights and against corruption and violence, and to give them wisdom as they carry out this work.

## November 13 – Laity Sunday

This day calls the Church to celebrate the ministry of Christians of all ages in the home, workplace, congregation, community, and world. Meet a special lay person from a small town in El Salvador...

Look at the face of this woman who has gathered with her children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren for worship at *Iglesia Luterana Pan de Vida (Bread of Life Lutheran Church)*. These eyes have seen a great deal over the years: a hard life made all the more cruel in knowing that God has provided enough, but that those with plenty will not share; eyes that have known sorrow as loved ones and neighbors disappeared in the middle of the night; eyes filled with anguish not knowing the fate of the young one who feels compelled to leave to look for work in the United States. And yet, on this day we all gather in God's house to hear the Word which has sustained God's people for centuries in the face of hard, unfair lives, in the face of sorrow, in the face of anguish. On this day we gather to be forgiven and restored: *Vamos todos al banquete, a la mesa de la creación (Let us go now to the banquet, to the table of creation)*. On this day we gather to share the peace of Christ. This woman is the first to come forward to share this peace with a visitor. Look at the face of this woman. The face of Jesus' great-grandmother might have looked a lot like this.



## November 20 – Student Day

This day calls the Church to support students in uniting faith with knowledge. This is important for all Christians, here and in El Salvador. The following is an excerpt from Samantha Conrad's journal written in August 2006 during a visit to the community of Rutilio Grande with a delegation from Cross of Life that included a dentist. Samantha is now a college junior and has enrolled in a dental program after having this experience.....

8/15/06 We wake up to roosters and dogs barking. I have one word for you--roisserie! Erin, Ralph and I decide to stay back and start clinics early rather than climb the hill. We are up for breakfast of huevos rancheros, re-fried beans, plantains and Corina's cookies (delicious). We start at 9:00 am and get about four patients in before lunch, including our friend Raul who bumped his head yesterday. He comes in to have decayed baby teeth removed. He's crying as soon as he sees the needle. Ralph puts it in while Raul screams and cries. His parents hold his hand and try to calm him--no luck. Ralph says just do it as we attempt to get 3 extractions. Time to pull--you can hear this kid screaming down the street. We get two of them out, as one tooth flies across the room past my face. We give up on the third and just tell him he's done--the screaming is unbearable. We break for lunch of steak with veggies and rice. Back to work at 1:30 and we go until 7:00pm. No more extractions, just fillings and cleanings. We work on a lot of younger women and find that they believe that their previous fillings are cavities because of their darkness. Even if Ralph finds nothing terribly wrong, they find pain in anyway. We end at 7:00 pm after our helper Luis finds us a light...should we work until 10:00?



*This photo was taken during a follow-up visit to Rutilio Grande in February, 2007.*

## November 24 – Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is an opportunity to give thanks for God's blessings, often by prayer and feasts. It can be a time to remember when the Native American tribal peoples made survival possible for the early immigrants to the USA and even an opportunity for repentance and reconciliation between indigenous and immigrant peoples.

We are good at the feasting part, and we try to make time for the prayer part. Our kids bring home Pilgrim and Indian crafts from school, but do we think about our call to make survival possible for others or our responsibility to new immigrants as we are now the established population in the land of abundance?

While El Salvador has a population of 5.9 million people, as of 2006 there were 2.9 million Salvadorans living outside of El Salvador, 2.5 million of whom are living, legally or illegally, in the United States. What are we doing as God's people to offer them the same hospitality that our ancestors were offered when they came here? Do we have room for repentance and reconciliation?

The action of giving thanks in the Bible is always accompanied by giving from the abundance that we are given. Saying "thank-you" to God is not limited to a verbal expression of thanks. It includes taking what we have been given and sharing it with others; in community feasting, in offerings to God, and in offerings to the poor.

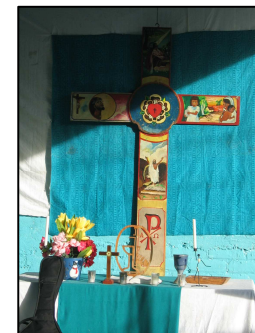
This weekend as you pray, feast, gather with family, and celebrate consider what you can do to make a meaningful offering of what you have been given to others who have less. Perhaps supporting the pastoral endowment fund is a way, or giving to a food pantry, or inviting a poor or immigrant family to join yours for a time of holiday celebration. Give thanks, with a grateful heart, for all that you have.



*Special guisquil soup (similar to a squash)*

## November 27 – Christ the King

Soyapango El Salvador  
Friday, February 2, 2007  
Susan Hilgart  
Cross of Life Lutheran Church



All About Stories.... Bible Stories that is. We arrive at our Sister Church, Cordero De Dios in Soyapango, El Salvador. Pastor Norma and her "kids" (teens from her church) greet us with great enthusiasm. We are all so happy to see each other. We enter through the iron gate to their outdoor sanctuary. It's beautiful! The brick walls tower above our heads and the sun shines, from above, so vibrantly that the humble wooden altar in the corner, draped in white, displaying a modest wooden cross, appears breathtaking. The walls are painted a bright turquoise color and surround the outdoor sanctuary creating a reverent, safe, magical, festive, transformable screen. Making this place the only place I want to be at this moment.

They have an activity planned! As we look closer to the stunning turquoise walls we notice tracings done in pencil. As the students proudly tour us to each tracing we see children's Bibles, laying about on chairs, open to Bible stories. The students have traced the familiar stories onto the walls. There stood John the Baptist baptizing Jesus, Adam & Eve, and sketch after sketch of "those old, so familiar, stories we've all heard told. Then begins our activity together...bringing these sketches "to life", with paints. Beautiful, vibrant colored, hand mixed, paints that pop from the turquoise walls of this special place. We paint. We laugh. We talk. Yes, believe it or not, at this time, in this place our language barrier did not matter. Our paint strokes, the twinkles in our eyes, the smiles on our faces and the Bible stories, themselves, all connected us in a way that needed no common language. These stories are our gift of faith, to be shared over and over. Bible stories are Bible stories in any language. What a blessing.