

History of The Salvadoran Lutheran Church

WE WERE BORN IN PASAQUINA, LA UNIÓN

The Salvadoran Lutheran Church emerged in 1952 in the eastern population of Pasaquina, as a result of the missionary effort of the North American pastor Robert Gussick, based in Guatemala and representative of the Lutheran Church of the Missouri Synod, USA, from Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

REV. CIRO MEJIA, OUR FIRST ORDAINED PASTOR

On November 21st, 1961, in the Lutheran Church of Zacapa, Guatemala, the Salvadoran pastor *Ciro Mejía* was ordained. He then assumed leadership of the Lutheran Church of Pasaquina, beginning a new period in which national pastors assume leadership of the mission.

CREATION OF THE FAITH AND HOPE SHELTER

In late April 1982, the leaders of the Lutheran Church received an urgent request for help from a group of civilians made up of children, women, and elderly persons who were in San Vicente without any type of food or medicine, caught in the crossfire between the military forces and the insurgents. In the face of this critical situation, the then Reverend *Medardo Gómez* decided to begin a project to help the refugees and began the Faith and Hope Shelter with the help and solidarity of the Norwegian Lutheran Church. This was the beginning of our social work with the neediest. Previously in 1969, *Rev. Mauro Recinos* began this social work helping those displaced by the conflict that year with Honduras.

A NEW VISION

The creation of the Faith and Hope Shelter in May 1982 put us in contact with the popular movement, with the Catholic Church and other historic churches, and with international solidarity groups. These contacts permitted us to reflect from a faith perspective on our commitment to work for peace and justice.

PERSECUTION

The Faith and Hope Shelter along with a new vision of hope to be a church in the context of an armed war also placed us in a situation of persecution. In 1983 the death squads kidnapped our Bishop *Medardo Gómez* and *Dr. Angel Ibarra*, who were freed thanks to international solidarity. Also, on November 21st 1984, *Rev. David Fernández*, the pastor of the Lutheran Church of San Miguel, was assassinated by members of the army.

THE SUBVERSIVE CROSS

On November 16th, 1989, the government army began looking again for Bishop *Medardo Gómez* with the intention to assassinate him, but they did not find him. When they couldn't find him, they took as a symbol a "kidnapped" cross that was in the Resurrection Church. The cross survived its imprisonment, and stands today as a symbol of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, as it rests in Resurrection Church.

THE LUTHERAN BISHOP

On August 6th, 1986, Rev. Medardo Gómez was consecrated as a Bishop by the Swedish Lutheran Bishop Oke Kastlund, thus acquiring the apostolic succession. This consecration responded to the need to strengthen the humanitarian aid work being carried out with the civilian population and to respond to the growth of the church as it extended throughout the country.

MEMBERS OF THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

The consecration of Rev. Medardo Gómez as Bishop led to the construction of a National Church, and the move to become part of the Lutheran World Federation that brings together Lutheran Churches from 120 countries.

ORDINATION OF WOMEN

In 1986 the first ordination of women was carried out on the deaconate level. This act marked a new movement in the life of the Lutheran Church, which was ratified years later (1994) with the ordination of Abelina Centeno and Marina Méndez to holy ordained ministry.

THE STRUGGLE FOR PEACE

During the armed conflict our church played a prominent role in the struggle for a political solution to the conflict. We accompanied the actions of the Permanent Committee for National Debate (CPDN). Through prayer and in the streets we cried out for an end to the armed conflict.

IN THE POSTWAR, NEW CHALLENGES

After the signing of the Peace Accords we have worked for the democratization and reconciliation of El Salvador. Our commitment was to contribute to assure the presence of a new National Civilian Police Force and a government office for the Defense of Human Rights.

COMMITTED TO THE UNITY OF CHURCHES

In November 1991 we contributed to the creation of the National Council of Churches (C.N.I) together with the Episcopal Church, Reformed Church and other churches. In 1999 we participated in an Ecumenical Celebration with the Roman Catholic Church where we ratified our commitment to the unity of churches.

WE RESTRUCTURE TO SERVE BETTER

Since the end of 1999 we have worked on a process of renovation that led us to changes in our structure. We ratified the leadership of our Bishop Medardo Gómez; at the same time we compacted our social programs.