

Background on Comunidad Rutilio Grande.

Our synod first became connected to El Salvador in 1988 when at our first Synod Assembly we passed a resolution to become a sister synod with the Salvadoran Lutheran Synod. El Salvador was in the midst of an armed conflict that had begun roughly in the early 80's. Our bishop and one synod staff person made visits to El Salvador. One of the pressing issues was the return and resettlement of refugees who had fled from their homes because of the war. The Salvadoran government was opposed to their return and it fell to the churches to try to help them. The Salvadoran Lutheran Synod was involved in that effort.

Our synod was offered and accepted the opportunity to develop a sistering relationship with a group of refugees to return from Nicaragua in late 1990. These people returned to El Salvador on March 15, 1991 and settled in an area known as El Jicaron. They organized as a community and renamed themselves Comunidad Rutilio Grande, after the first priest killed in El Salvador. Our synod helped them buy the land and also advocated with the Salvadoran government to let them back into the country. A Wisconsin man actually accompanied them on their return in our behalf.

The community currently consists of about 278 people living in 65 homes. There is a grade school that offers Grades 1-6. A child care center takes infants up to kindergarten. The community has a small clinic with the services of a health promoter and a botanical garden/natural medicine project. The youth are carrying out a number of projects that benefit the community as a whole.

Beginning in late 1991, our synod has sent delegates to visit the community and has maintained regular communication. Our relationship has been formally administered through the SHARE Foundation, an organization created by US churches to support the poor communities of El Salvador. Through the increased access to communication technology, we have been able to communicate directly with the community in recent years.

Former projects that we have supported as a synod in addition to the land purchase include bringing electricity to the community, chickens, cattle, finishing the community building, teacher scholarships and most recently, junior and senior high student scholarships. We began the scholarship project 3 years ago and have now renewed our participation for an additional 3 years. Several students have graduated but through our help, many more are now studying in high school, a dream that would not have been otherwise possible.