

Comunidad Rutilio Grande El Salvador



The Greater Milwaukee Synod has accompanied this community of 55 families and about 275 people, displaced from El Salvador to Nicaragua during the war in El Salvador since 1990 when they were planning their return to their homeland.

HISTORY

Following the resolution passed by the Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly in 1988, our synod began its journey of accompaniment with the Salvadoran people. This was a critical time for both El Salvador and the United States in that El Salvador was in the midst of a civil conflict and thousands of people of faith from in the United States went to El Salvador to accompany victims of this conflict, both displaced and not displaced as they tried to survive in war zones. Thousands had fled to Honduras and Nicaragua as well as to safer areas near San Salvador.



In 1989, an interfaith delegation from Wisconsin sponsored by the Wisconsin Interfaith Committee on Central America which included members from the Greater Milwaukee Synod returned from El Salvador telling of the need to accompany Salvadoran people displaced by the war to return home to reestablish their communities.

Through the SHARE Foundation, our synod became linked with a group of Salvadorans who fled to Nicaragua and were returning after 11 years of displacement. Together they founded

Comunidad Rutilio Grande on March 15, 1991 naming their community after the first priest killed in El Salvador who was from that very same area.

A representative from Wisconsin accompanied the people in their return to El Salvador. When their possessions were stopped at the border, the Greater Milwaukee Synod advocated with the Salvadoran government to allow them to enter the country.



Starting from the ground up, this courageous community of 55 families with 350 people purchased land for the community and through assistance from the Spanish government, built houses. Within months, the community started its own school with volunteer teachers, two of them teenagers studying in the morning and teaching in the afternoon.

Until a new mayor was elected in 1994, this community received NO assistance from its own government and was completely dependant on international support which included faith communities in the United States connected to it through the SHARE Foundation. These faith communities provided some support for projects but more importantly, provided advocacy. It was through the organizational relationship with neighboring communities and international eyes that these civilians were kept safe during those last years of war.

ACCOMPANIMENT THROUGHOUT THE YEARS

Following the Peace Accords and subsequent elections, the community, together with its international companions, has been able to work toward a better life with important infrastructure such as electricity, a community building and a church, plus small projects for economic development. Recently, a project to bring indoor plumbing and running water is in progress.



The most important collaboration has been the investment in the youth of this community through a scholarship project that allows all the youth to pursue high school degrees. The result of this very innovative project for this community has been youth commitment and involvement in bettering the lives of all through community service projects administered by the youth and participation service in community governing structures. The biggest outcome has been the complete absence of youth gang, drug and crime problems in this community, unlike neighboring communities. Several youth have gone on the study at the university level. Many more would love to have that opportunity.

COMUNIDAD RUTILIO GRANDE TODAY

Today, this community has a church with regular worship, catechism and an education program, a grade school that goes to the Sixth Grade, a community building for meetings and celebrations, houses that now contain bathrooms with running water, athletic facilities such as a basketball court and a soccer field, a child care center, a health center with a radio station but most of all, youth who are motivated to continue their studies and contribute hours of community service each week to grow vegetables, care for chickens, grind corn for tortillas, run the radio station, and work with the younger children.



Our relationship with this community over these past years has richly blessed the Greater Milwaukee Synod. The opportunity to walk with this repopulated community through its struggles to remain organized as a true community that seeks to protect all its members and work together for the good of the whole has taught us much about what it takes to set aside our individual desires in order to work for the good of the whole. It is what Jesus calls us to do as the Body of Christ. Examples abound. In this day of individualism where we pursue our own agendas, it is inspiring to know Christians who truly live their faith 24/7; where the well-being of the neighbor is just as important to me as my well-being.



PROFILES OF COMMUNITY LEADERS

ANTONIO RAMOS is the President of the community. Antonio owns a bus which operates on one of the bus routes to Suchitoto. Gas costs and his monthly loan payment more often than not, eat up the entire profit he makes on the route. His wife Marta Alicia is a teacher in one room school in a neighboring community. Friends who have emigrated to the US tell him to join them there so that he can pay off his bus loan and get ahead, but Antonio chooses to stay in El Salvador because of his commitment to his wife and four minor children who need his daily presence as a father and his commitment to his community that needs his leadership.



MARTA BONILLA has been the Coordinator of the school almost continuously since the school started in 1991. The war separated Marta and her siblings from their parents when she was 12. It was years before they saw their parents again! During her youth, she worked in various capacities supporting the FMLN who took her and her siblings under their wing and fed them. In the end she was one of the cooks for several units. The community often calls on her because she knows how to prepare meals for large groups! Marta teaches First and Second Grades in the morning and Fifth and Sixth Grade in the afternoon.



Now in her final year of university education, **GRISELDA RAMIREZ** serves on the community's council in addition to her work with the children of the community. Griselda was one of the first youth in the community to organize a children's group to give them the opportunity to learn leadership skills and to help beautify the community with a litter collection campaign. (Youth on the right)



NUBIA RAMOS is currently a second year law student. She commutes to San Salvador for her classes. Long time president of the youth committee, she organized a strong youth organization that continues to contribute to the community and uses its energies for a new future. (Youth in the middle – her sister Natali, on the left, also participated in the scholarship program)

OFELIA GARCIA was the first Vice-president of the community and started the community's first store. She and her family have done much to support this community's progress. One daughter, teacher, served as president of the community. Another daughter SONIA, also a teacher, handled finances for the community and now teaches Third and Fourth Grade.



FRANCISCO MENJIVAR worked as a catechist with Monseñor Romero and uses that experience to contribute to the pastoral work in the community.

