
VIM EL SALVADOR

Volume 1, Number 2

July 2001

La Revda. Kay Schmitt

Installed in street ceremony

ES - The Celebration of New Ministry in the Book of Common Prayer used in El Salvador is almost the same as that which we find in The Canadian Book of Alternative Services. However, the service of induction of The Rev. Kathleen Schmitt as Rector of *la Iglesia de la Santísima Trinidad* (Holy Trinity Church) had its distinctive cultural colour. First, the church building was too small for the group of over one hundred people who attended. In fact the church is usually too small for the regular Sunday celebrations. Normally the additional people sit on the sidewalk outside the church. But today the holy table was placed near the wall and across the sidewalk and the people assembled in the street where they had arranged chairs and benches

Santísima Trinidad is located in a poor suburb of San Salvador, San Martín, and is part of the Santa Teresa cooperative housing development that began construction just after the war, in 1992. The people here are proud of their concrete homes, which they built in a mutual support project, and have a strong community spirit. There is a big *concha de fútbol* (soccer pitch) just across from the Church. Several young men reminded me that *el equipo* (team) *Santísima Trinidad* was the local tournament champion from last year and that it was also the current "Bishop's Cup" champion. This *fútbol* team and the active youth ministry of the parish play a crucial role in the lives of many of the young people in the community.

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33RD CONVENTION

The Diocese of El Salvador

KS - Key to the morale of a small diocese like El Salvador is support that comes from outside the country. At the 33rd Convention of the Diocese, Bishop Martín Barahona told of many gifts and avowals of concern received after the earthquakes.

The Diocese of Haiti, much poorer than El Salvador, sent a letter of support and a financial gift. The Church of India enclosed a note with their gift that "there are tears in our hearts for the people of El Salvador." Soon the Diocese of El Salvador sent a letter back to support the people of India following the earthquake tragedy there. The Japanese Anglican Church sent a generous contribution. Japan also has frequent and sometimes serious earthquakes.

A great deal of support has come from parishes and dioceses in the Episcopal Church in the United States and the Episcopal Development Fund. Until four years ago, the Diocese of El Salvador was part of a province of the U. S. Church. Much

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Youth Synod

ES - The Diocese of El Salvador has a Youth Synod each year. It is an opportunity for young people who are leaders in their parishes to come together for a weekend. This year the Synod was held at the Diocesan Conference Centre, "Cielo Mar", located on the Pacific Coast. The young people came with a great deal of energy and, in most cases, a commitment to having a good time. The young people, from about 16 to 30, were somewhat constrained because of a tropical storm that was centred in Mexico. Because the waves were quite high the youth stayed within the walled compound for much of the time. For me the mild storm made it very pleasant. The temperatures were in the low 20's C.

The programme, and the young people, in many ways were similar to young people in Canada. They had loud music, great quantities of food, late hours and generally a high-energy time. One thing that was impressive was the relaxed programming. There were large blocks of time for the young people simply to enjoy the sea and one another's company. I was impressed by how well these young people were able to structure their free time. There was very good programming -- Bible study, business meeting, worship time and talent night. In many ways, I was feeling that this is not very different than a similar programme in Canada, and I was probably correct, until we were in the middle of the Bishop's Bible study.

The Bible study was very much like Bible studies that we have in Canada. A young man read the text, the Bishop gave background, and then he asked that the text be read again, this time with reflections about when you were very young. These young people, who are so much like youth in Canada, began to talk about their pain. The context that the Bishop gave them was very powerful for this group of young people who were young children during the civil war. Young people who had just been playing fútbol and telling silly stories all at once became quiet, attentive listeners as members of the group shared their pain.

Juan, a high-energy young man of about 20, talked about losing his father and two siblings during the war. His father was not involved in any political activities; he and the children were simply shot. His mother was unable to cope with all of this; therefore, he was placed in an orphanage for six years. He now lives with his mother, who is so emotionally weak that he must take care of her. He has not completed his basic education and is occasionally employed learning the trade as a welder's helper.

María, a young woman in her early twenties, told of being abandoned as an infant. When some of the members asked her several questions she responded with astounding grace. She has no idea who her parents might be. She simply feels abandoned even at this time. These examples, unfortunately, were not exceptional. Most of the youth in the small group with which I was participating had been deeply affected by the civil war in El Salvador.

I was moved by the strength of spirit that I encountered in the witness of these young people as they were celebrating their faith and life. ❖



Childhood Memories of War

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of the U. S. support will go to the construction of houses for people who lost their homes in one of the quakes.

The Church of England and the Church in Australia were also contributors, as was the Primate's Relief and World Development Fund of the Anglican Church of Canada and churches of other denominations.

The Convention theme was "A Holistic Approach to Reconstruction: Get up and walk" based on the story of Jesus healing the man who was paralysed. (Matthew 9.5) Important to the meaning of the theme is the Spanish word for "walk," *andar*. *Andar* means much more than simply walk. A better translation might be "get with it", "be active", or "do something." As well, the word *levantar* for "get yourself up" means "get up prepared to do something." "Reconstruction" is a word used constantly these days in El Salvador to communicate the hope of building a stronger El Salvador.

The Convention established a new mission and approved a new partner relationship with the Diocese of San Diego. Members also elected delegates to the 2nd Synod of the Province of Central America that will meet in Guatemala next spring,

Ecumenical and Anglican visitors included representatives from the two partner dioceses of San Diego and New Jersey, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of El Salvador along with the Papal Nuncio, the pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church (a long time friend) and the pastor of a progressive Reformed Church. ❖

Can Anglicans Offer Hope?

By Edward Schmitt

Warmth and a fantastic will to survive characterize the people of El Salvador. In a country controlled by fourteen families, economic and social advancement is difficult. Power brokers do not even use the myth of the North of a level playing field

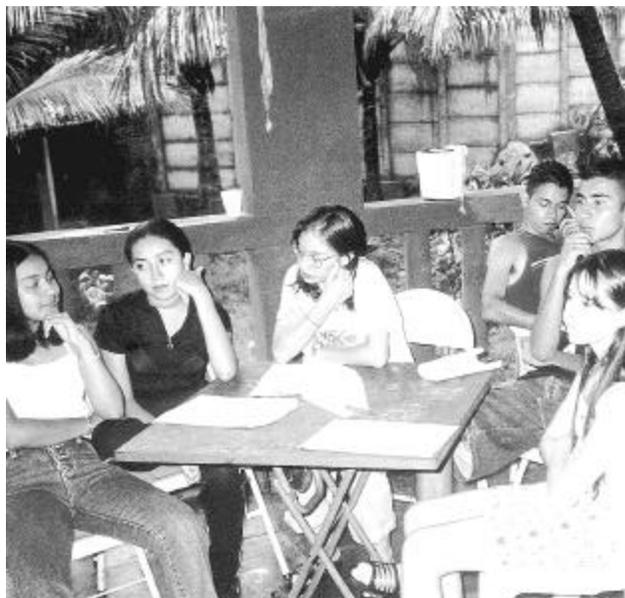
A recent scandal in the press related to a large donation of chemical fertiliser by the state of Japan. The donation included a mandate that no farm or person would get over a hundred bags of fertilizer as the aid was only for small and medium sized farms. According to the ***El Diario de Hoy***, a leading national newspaper, one agribusiness ended up with seventy thousand bags. Because the Japanese accountants require good records, the apparent cover-up was exposed.

The economic and social repression here predictably affects many individuals. As I travel around the Diocese, I have the chance to talk, and more crucially listen, to concerns. Often, especially with young people, persons express worry about planning. That many feel their only substantial hope for the future is to emigrate to the USA or Canada continues to startle me.

A young man, who worships at a rural church where I often preside at the Eucharist, told me of his pending graduation from university with an engineering degree. Although he has a position as instructor at the University, he is deeply frustrated because he wants to continue his research. "More advanced research is not possible here because we do not have the necessary laboratory equipment. The problem in large part is that the *maquilas* only offer work at subsistence wages. Because of laws and customs in the owners' countries, the research and development goes to North America, Europe and Asia. Almost no research jobs exist at an advanced level in El Salvador."

Another man's wife is an undocumented immigrant in the USA. He wants to take the children and join his wife. "What can you or the Church do to help?"

A talented artisan feels vulnerable in the post war



Youth Plan for Service in the Community



Presenting Plans for Action

situation because during the war he was in a revolutionary political group. Now, displaced from his home because of the earthquake, he wants to move to Canada.

As an Anglican in El Salvador, the overwhelming concern that confronts me, is what is the church to say as good news to these people? How do we help these young people, many highly gifted, to have the hope to help make El Salvador a place where they want to stay and help in the process of rebuilding? ❖

You can support the rebuilding and development work of the Church in El Salvador by donations, marked El Salvador, to The Primates World Relief and Development Fund (in Canada) The Episcopal Relief Fund (in the USA)

EARTHQUAKE AFTERMATH

KS - After the earthquakes in El Salvador seemed to finish, there was a collective sigh of relief, although some children sleep with lights on, and families still live in temporary homes of plastic sheeting or corrugated tin. Others readjusted to normal life despite warnings from the national emergency agency about landslides to come once the rainy season begins.

True, when a tremor occurs, everyone stops talking. There is a dead quiet until the shaking stops. Then conversation resumes, often without comment. Persons simply assess the need to move to a place of safety. Once the threat dissipates, life continues as usual.

However, as the rains have begun to come, floods occur both inside and outside of San Salvador. In San Salvador, labourers keep working on damaged drains that cause flooding. The emergency agency has targeted almost every department of the country for high risk and possible evacuations.

In Las Lajas, Izalco and Sonsonate, a slide destroyed interim houses of 120 families. In four villages of Usulután, a slide covered two kilometres of road and isolated 400 people. Floods inundated three schools in Pasquina and Conchagua, La Unión. Nine streets in Santa Tecla, a suburb of San Salvador, flooded.

Fishers in La Libertad and the Pacific coastal area suffer daily losses due to the earthquakes and floods. The situation affects the agricultural sector, farmers suspending seeding until the weather normalises.

Major repairs to the main highway have been underway since the earthquakes occurred, much of the work being to stabilise the high cliffs above and below the road to prevent further rock and mud slides from blocking the freeway. The list goes on.

With much of the nation in the process of reconstruction, these setbacks across the country are intensified by the ongoing economic crisis in this country. ❖

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Sadly, the need for youth groups became clear during the celebration. Several young men circled the periphery of the church gathering chanting «*Salvatrucha Mares*». These young persons were members of the youth gangs that attract many youth who have lost hope in their society. (See: **Hope** page 3). Sadly, many of these young people get involved in a violent life-style of robbery, personal assault and drug and alcohol abuse. The church group gives support, hope and a healthy group identity for young people trying to find their way in this poor area. Soon 6 or 8 members of The Civilian National Police arrived, staying the whole service. Because the police system was reformed as part of the peace settlement, these police represent a sign of hope to many Salvadorians and their presence was celebrated.

Back to the ceremony: We walked several blocks to the top of the local hill where the Bishop blessed a concrete cross that had been placed there, with the permission of the municipality, by the parish. We returned to the street side altar singing and shooting off homemade rockets. There in the street Kathleen was installed, young people and babies baptised, others confirmed or received to the Anglican Communion and a group of adolescents received Solemn Communion for. After the Eucharist, members of the parish came out with baskets full of *panes* (sandwiches) which were shared by the faithful, the neighbours and the police.

This entire event sets a graphic context for the ministry that Kay has been called upon to lead. The parish is made up of people who have few financial resources, who live in a dangerous area, and, most importantly, have faith in Christ as they discover him in their community. These are a people of hope in a context where many seem to have lost the capacity for hope. ❖

MORE GLIMPSES OF THE HEALTH SCENE

KS - On a main highway we saw a woman in the back of a pickup going to hospital in the city, uniformed medics and nurses clustered round, one holding an intravenous bottle high in the air.

Two women suffer tachicardia (fast heart beat). At the public hospital to renew medications, the doctor told them he had no medicine at all to give them.

Beside a highway, we saw a pickup upside down. Our first thought: hope no one was riding in the back, a common mode of transportation here. The mortality rate in vehicle accidents in El Salvador is extremely high.

When one of the diocesan clergy was in hospital, the room he was in was baking hot and cooled off a bit about sunrise. Families may bring in fans, but a fan is a luxury for the poorer people of the country.

Due to the earthquakes, Santa Tecla, an affluent suburb of San Salvador, and San Vicente, a city of 73,000, both still function with hospitals in tents. ❖



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