

The History of First Lutheran Church and San Antonio Los Ranchos in El Salvador in mission together.

The history of the relationship with the community of San Antonio Los Ranchos in El Salvador and First Lutheran Church has its roots in a trip to Monterrey, Mexico in 1996 with a group called Youth with a Mission. Out of that trip grew an interest to create a long term relationship with a community in Latin America. Those planning this relationship were Brooks Anderson, Kristin Garey, Kerri Sjoblom, David Tryggestad, and Will Sjoblom. They hoped to have the focus on friendship and equality as well as learning from each other. A connection with San Antonio Los Ranchos was made through the organization called Sister Parish (www.sisterparish.org) in the fall of 1997. Through this connection delegations from our church to the Los Ranchos community as well as visits from Los Ranchos and Sister Parish staff in Latin America have been made. We have also given presentations about this relationship at First Lutheran.

The *first* delegation visited in March of 1998 and included the following: Tom Sullwold, Pastor David Tryggestad, Martha Larson, Brooks Anderson, Kris Garey, Kerri Sjoblom, and Will Sjoblom. The delegation stayed with families in Los Ranchos and visited areas of interest there and in San Salvador.

In November of 1998 the *second* delegation visited Los Ranchos and included Kerri Sjoblom, Kris Garey, and Liv Zempel (a relative of Kris Garey's). A banner designed and made by Jeanette Paulson, a member of First Lutheran, was presented to the community at their church.

The *third* delegation was in February 2000 and involved Kris Garey, Margaret Sproat, Cherokee Rova, Kerri Sjoblom, Tom Sullwold, and Arlene Murphy (from Concordia Lutheran Church) and involved stays with families in the community and visiting various sites in Chalatenango area and in San Salvador.

The *fourth* delegation took place in August 2001 during a festival which commemorated the community's return from the refugee camps in Honduras in 1988 (and later years). The delegation visited a dental clinic, regional community organizers, day care center, community leaders, neighboring communities, and some historical sites. Those involved were: Kris Garey, Anne Rogotzke, and Kerri Sjoblom.

In July of 2003 church members hosted Consuelo Ayala Sosa and interpreter Yvonne Dilling (who had worked in the area for over 20 years and is from Indiana). Consuelo visited several church and community groups and was hosted by various families. She presented our church with a beautiful altar cloth made by the women's sewing group in Los Ranchos.

In November 2004 the *fifth* delegation focused on the confirmation age youth and included Katie Rogotzke, Leah Rogotzke, Margaret Sproat, and Anne Rogotzke. Highlights were traveling with youth from Los Ranchos to various historical sites in San Salvador, meeting with community organizers, and one member worked in a medical clinic for a day.

In January 2005 the First Lutheran Sister Parish Committee hosted a Circle of Support Dinner for those who had contributed to the delegation in the past fall. Bea Ojakangas cooked a Salvadoran meal and over thirty people attended the dinner and program.

A scholarship fund was set up in May 2005 with \$1200 sent then and again in December. Presently a check for \$1500 is sent twice a year to help college students with various expenses. The Sister Parish committee in Los Ranchos and the Sister Parish coordinator in El Salvador coordinate and distribute the funds to students on a monthly basis. Between eight and fifteen students have received scholarships each year.

In October 2005, Sister Parish liaison and Salvadoran, Jose` Isabel Membreno, visited our community for several days and met with church groups, the Promise Preschool children, local high school Spanish classes, and community groups.

In December 2005 we hosted Yvonne Dilling, Sister Parish liaison, to further plan and nurture our relationship with Los Ranchos, and to discuss the scholarship fund.

In September 2006 we hosted Alejandro Alfaro, (who was the Co-Executive Director of Sister Parish and from Guatemala). He met with several church members at a picnic at Brighton Beach and gave us an update on things going on in Los Ranchos.

In February 2008 the *sixth* delegation featured four youth (Malaika Magomolla, Reagan Hall, Steven Rennan, and Leah Rogotzke) and three adults (Ben Durbin, Anne Rogotzke, and Will Sjoblom). The delegation toured various sites in San Salvador to learn the history of the Salvadoran people and about the significance of former Archbishop Oscar Romero. They stayed with community members and learned about their history and community through visits to the Sumpul River, schools, medical clinic, and town officials. They also spent time with some of the scholarship students. The group presented the community with the Advent banner made by FLC Sunday School students and families, with school and sports supplies, and with financial support for their daycare.

In March of 2009 Will Sjoblom visited Los Ranchos and met with the Sister Parish committee. During the Sunday Mass he read a letter from our congregation which emphasized our continued solidarity with the people of Los Ranchos. Other visits were made by Kerri Sjoblom in 2002, 2004, 2007, 2008, and 2009 to renew friendships. Will also visited Los Ranchos in March 2010 as part of a Sister Parish 30th anniversary of Romero delegation and presented a banner to the church as well as visiting various groups.

Various presentations on our relationship with Los Ranchos have been made at forums between services and also at the Global Festival of Faith held at our church in January. In July of 2006 an "El Salvador" day was organized during the God's Global Family Bible Program with Anne Rogotzke leading various youth in a skit and discussion. In January 2007 Leah Rogotzke and Dory Sjoblom led a children's program on El Salvador at the Global Festival of Faith. In January of 2010 an intergenerational program will be held with a summary of our relationship as well as activities such as writing to the scholarship students and coloring pictures similar to Salvadoran artwork.

The Sister Parish committee meets every one to two months to discuss: correspondence to Los Ranchos and our church community (via the Builder), sending scholarships twice yearly, selling items at the Scandinavian Craft and Food Festival in late October, arranging commemoration of important events concerning our El Salvador community (a tribute in memory of Archbishop Oscar Romero), organizing delegations and other events. We are currently working on having a delegation come here from Los Ranchos in October 2010.

Those involved in our Sister Parish relationship with Los Ranchos feel there is a significant impact in seeing God's work done in areas that Jesus called us to. Through working with the people of our sister community, hearing their stories, living in their homes, sharing meals, learning of their healing and hope, and sharing in their worship, we have learned of the inter-relatedness of our lives and the great effect that faith has had on them and how it can change us to work for a more just world.