



How many Lutheran bishops do you suppose have visited Salvadoran prisons?

I would venture to surmise that our Bishop Larry is one of an extremely select micro-group, an honour shared perhaps only by Salvadoran Bishop Gómez. Not only has he visited women's and men's sectors of prison inmates, but also the "homosexual" (trans-) sector of El Salvador's prison system. Alas, the plan to visit the most abandoned of the abandoned, those about whom I have written recently, the "retired" gang homeboys, was not to be . . . and just as we have successfully leapt several hurdles enabling us to meet--not once, but twice--with 21 of the anticipated 26 homeboy participants.

I don't always have vehicle breakdowns, but when I do, I prefer to be well-accompanied, especially by Canadians (cf. the 4 Camrosians--3 Davids and a Doug--back in the 90's, and Rev. Terry Richardson in 2011, enabling him to get a late-night tow-truck tour through some of the most unlikely tourist neighbourhoods), and especially by Lutheran bishops and family members. The non-tragic break of the tie-rod, just two weeks after a full inspection, meant to assure immunity from such risks and inconveniences for the duration of the visit and beyond, prevented what was sure to have been a most gracious welcome, leading into several hours of spirit-stretching testimony of the most incredulous nature--a truly memorable visit, as I am privileged to absorb each week, but which our bishop and entourage will have to return to El Salvador to experience.

Our earlier-than-anticipated arrival home enabled a bit more backyard-time, time of which the bishop's wife took advantage, to climb the guava tree, claiming a perch from which to take photos of the bishop, relaxing in a hammock, barely visible beneath several layers of foliage. The tropical rains soon forced us indoors, where we could wade in the through-the-house stream, besides several outdoor pools, where drainage is inadequate to accommodate the runoff from the tropical downpour.

Salvadoran colleagues and myself are most enthused about this visit, feeling much affirmed by it, especially given the uncertainty of the past couple years of transition. This mission with El Salvador,

unconventional since its inception in 1988, enthusiastically supported by the national ELCIC and CLWR until 2011, has been enthusiastically adopted by the ABT Synod, as affirmed by this intense visit of accompaniment and solidarity.

This same period has been one of positive transition in El Salvador, especially among the rival gangs and most sectors of prison inmates, leading to an atmosphere of trust and harmony in the prisons and hope for a more secure, peaceful society generally (daily murder rate still holding at about 6, after a pre-gang-truce daily average of 14). It is especially critical not to have abandoned this ministry at this significant juncture, as much of the world is watching (i.e., UN, EU, OAS, several governments), and seeking to support this process of peace and reconciliation in a variety of ways. It is providential that we are in the midst of this juncture, accompanying from the inside, well-recognized and well-placed. *Muchas gracias* to the ABT Synod, visitors `Bishop Larry, his wife Cathy, and Gail & Phil Berg (of Grenada mission accompaniment experience), and so many other supporters, for continuing "In Mission with El Salvador", "*En Misión con El Salvador.*" May God bless your vision and your conviction.

Paz,

Brian Rude

Rev. Brian Rude, DD

