



2017 Report

En Misión con El Salvador: In Mission with El Salvador

2017 was a year of loss, with our father's death on 15 January and burial on 20 January. This was followed by two weeks of visiting a close friend and his family in hospital in San Salvador. He succumbed to pneumonia on 23 February. Another friend and I accompanied his family for the wake, funeral and burial in Sonsonate and Izalco.

While in Alberta, I was able to stay on after Dad's funeral and take in the ABT Synod study conference, which was a great opportunity, not only to speak about El Salvador in the plenary for a few minutes, but to chat with numerous interested friends and colleagues about life and ministry, both our Synod ministry in El Salvador and their local ministries around Alberta and the Territories.

I underwent considerable reconstructive odontological work in late 2017 and early 2018, due to what seems to have been malpractice on the part of my dentist of the previous decade. This new dentist, also the communications person for *CRISPAZ*, discovered cavities and decay inside numerous fillings. Several crowns, inlays and onlays were required, as well as dentures for two molars, one of which had fallen out while I was in South Africa in July, 2016, without pain or bleeding.

I attended the wake, funeral and burial of a senior pastor, Eliseo Rodriguez, along with most of the Salvadoran pastors.

In late November the Salvadoran Lutheran Church commemorated its subversive cross, which was kidnapped from *La Resurrección* cathedral Church hours after the Jesuit priests were martyred, during the offensive of November, 1989. Since I was arrested at the same time, together with eleven other international church workers and three Salvadorans, I was asked to tell of my experiences and reflect on them at this event. The event was held at the same hotel to which I had been brought following my release from prison, and where I had been first interviewed by the CBC, together with my parents, from their living room in Camrose. This was significant for me, since it was the first time I had had the opportunity to tell my story publicly in El Salvador. The story of the subversive cross had always been told to visiting delegations by the bishop, who was not present, with only a passing mention of the arrest of twelve international and three national church workers. I had always felt that the "historical memory" should be expanded to include our story, as well as that of dozens of church workers and hundreds of displaced persons who made that week so memorable, camping out in the offices and clinics surrounding the church. This opportunity was a start, a hopeful sign that that process of collective historical memory will develop over the coming years.

I accompanied 50 pastors and church workers on a four-day retreat to Tikal, Guatemala, Dec. 12 - 15. Though only about half of the Salvadoran pastors joined in this retreat, it was a marvelous opportunity to share life and experiences together, learning about their varied ministries and their Mayan roots among the impressive pyramids.

In some ways 2017 was a slow year. Prison visits were not allowed, either for our 20-year holistic health program, or for *IPAZ* visits, to dialogue with gang inmates. I have felt as though I am in exile from my ministry, my passion, isolated from the folk who had given so much meaning to my life and ministry over the previous two decades. With the "extraordinary measures", implemented in April, 2016, supposedly temporarily, physical and psychological conditions for inmates are getting steadily worse. The national director has acknowledged 1,400 cases of tuberculosis in the prison system. One single prison is reporting 576 cases of severe malnutrition. Not even family, lawyers, the Red Cross, or church leaders etc., are allowed to enter. In our last visit to the maximum security prison, Zacatecoluca (dubbed Zacatraz), over two years ago, a guard advised me that not even God enters that prison. I assured him that God was already inside. In fact, God was there, in their midst and in their hearts. The UN rapporteur made public her assessment of prison conditions and these extraordinary measures at the beginning of February, 2018. She demanded that such measures be terminated immediately as they are inhumane. The authorities brushed her report and conclusion aside, refusing to follow her recommendations, judging that her assessment was based on misinformation and a lack of understanding of the Salvadoran reality.

The government, along with imposing these measures, has taken a firm stance against anything or anyone hinting of dialogue, including *IPAZ*. The atmosphere of weekly meetings seems to alternate between nervousness about a police raid, leading to arrests and interrogations, or a hopeful sense that the government will change course and realize that it needs *IPAZ* as an ally, to pursue dialogue and peace and so overcome the rampant social violence. Several "bridges" between gangs and *IPAZ* have been imprisoned or killed over the past couple years. Numerous pastoral members of *IPAZ* have been interrogated at length, and had their churches and offices inspected. This includes the Anglican bishop emeritus, a German Lutheran pastor, an evangelical pastor working with World Vision as well as another evangelical pastor. Still the conviction that God is calling us to promote dialogue in order to overcome social violence remains strong.

My home continues to be a 24 / 7 drop-in centre for a wide range of friends and contacts made over the past 30 years as well as many folks with a variety of needs, besides three regular housemates, and their circles of family, friends and colleagues. A moment of solitude is a rare blessing indeed. Each of these persons brings a piece of the national reality with them, and their manner of relating to and responding to that reality, so my home is my classroom, where I am always listening, learning, absorbing and responding. Many of these enjoy experimenting in the kitchen, which I keep well-stocked, so fasting and hunger are virtually impossible in this home.

Another benefit of always having folk around is that it is easy to plan a whole range of outings spontaneously--concerts, theatre, movies, hikes, beach excursions. Planning ahead doesn't usually work out, so such spontaneity suits us and whoever happens to be around at the moment and available to join us much better. Those waiting for an invitation will be left with liking our photos on Facebook.

Speaking of Facebook, I feel that this has opened a significant opportunity for ministry for me. I avoid speaking of, and posting photos of, prison and youth ministry, for their safety and mine, since many of those with whom I work could be on some hit list or other. Besides

my public faith-stance on a range of issues, I am able to communicate with folk around the continent, including dozens of marginalized youth with whom we worked in their streets and alleys from 2006-2011. Such chats can happen several times per day. Updates inform me that some of these youth have been killed. Some I have visited in prisons. So many others are very communicative on Facebook. A few I reconnect with in person, either in chance encounters, or for significant periods of time, often thanks to a Facebook connection.

I encourage ELCA and CRISPAZ board members and delegation members in the USA to use Facebook and other means to accompany and support Salvadorans living in the USA, especially if they are undocumented, or are facing the uncertainties of their status with DACA or TPS. Solidarity with Salvadorans includes these 2-3,000,000 compatriots, who need it at least as much as their family members still living in their homeland. Citizens of the USA are waking up to these troublesome realities, and are responding, thanks be to God.

Regular weekly activities:

Sunday -- worship at *La Resurrección*, San Salvador

Monday -- Salvadoran Lutheran Synod staff worship, followed by some mini meetings with pastors

The first Monday of each month is a Eucharist celebration. I presided and preached at this communion service on Dec. 4. I preached about the "subversive star", which caught the bishop's attention, having just commemorated the "subversive cross" in a significant way. Bishop Gómez "officialized" the idea of the subversive star. I had each participant light a candle, together forming a star, each one expressing one hope for 2018 on this liturgical New Year's Day (well, day after).

Tuesday -- IPAZ meeting, normally at Lutheran Bishop's office at *La Concordia*

Wednesday -- Pastors' worship and continuing education

Thursday -- HIV mutual support group at Rosales Public Hospital

Friday -- quite often a press conference or forum on some theme relating to the national reality, hosted by the Lutheran Church or some other church or non-profit organization

Saturday -- visit to former *Fe y Esperanza* residents in some rural community, or meeting in San Salvador

-- 3 CRISPAZ board meetings and 3 executive meetings (I am secretary), by Zoom

CRISPAZ Board and executive meetings (I am secretary):

Jan 7 -- CRISPAZ Exec.

Jan 21 -- C board (from Camrose)

Mar 3 -- C board

Jun 17 -- C exec

Aug 24 -- C board meeting

Oct 13 -- C exec meeting

Nov 8 - 12 -- C annual meeting in El Salvador

Other Activities:

- Jan 9 -- personal meeting with Jenna Knapp, Catholic Relief Services
(from USA, former volunteer at CRISPAZ and Quetzalcoatl)
- Jan 15 - Feb 11 -- Dad's funeral, Alberta
- Feb 5 -- mission session for Messiah, Camrose (via skype)
- Feb 5 -- Grace, Bentley
- Feb 6 - 8 -- ABT Synod study conference, Canmore
- Feb 9 -- David and Leah Mueller
- Feb 23, 24 -- Sonsonate and Izalco with Walter's family--wake, funeral and burial
- Feb 27 -- *IPAZ -- Cancillería*
- Mar 3 -- CIS (Centre for Exchange and Solidarity)
- Mar 8, 15 -- Seminars, *IPAZ, Transformación de Conflictos* (led these with Silke, German pastor)
- Mar 11 -- *Fe y Esperanza (F y E)*, Guazapa with Pr. Cruz
- Mar 14 -- *IPAZ*, Puerto Parada, Usulután
- Mar 23 -- *IPAZ*, book presentation
- Mar 23 -- San Andrés pyramids with delegation from Wisconsin
- Mar 24 -- Romero Day--mass, procession, mass, procession, night vigil
- Mar 25 -- *IPAZ*, Soyapango community event
- Mar 29 -- *IPAZ* with delegation from NYC
-- aft at *Iglesia Episcopal*
- Mar 30 -- meeting with Quetzalcoatl lawyer to wrap up financial matters
- Mar 31 -- *IPAZ*, Bajo Lempa, Usulután
- Apr 2 -- F y E, Ciudadela, Palo Grande
- Apr 8 -- F y E, Ayalitas, San Vicente
- Apr 29 -- F y E, Calderitas
- May 4 - June 5 -- vacation in AB and BC, visits with family, friends and colleagues in their homes (David Larsen, David & Leah Mueller, Barry Vall & Dawn Kilarski, Brian Heinrich, Jon & Karen Erickson, Cliff & Lorraine Reinhardt, Karen Reinhardt Lee, David Hunter & Margaret Hundebly, Peace Lutheran (Vernon), Jean Kavanagh, Grace Lutheran (Bentley), Church of the Cross (Calgary)
- May 14, preached and sang at St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church, Gibsons, BC
- July 1 - 8 -- first visit with Laverne (brother) & Lisa Rude in El Salvador
- July 25 -- *IPAZ* meeting with government officials at President's House
- July 30 -- University of El Salvador vigil for student massacre (1975)

August 1-6 -- Lutheran Anniversary celebrations
 Aug 2 -- Youth
 Aug 3 -- Women
 Aug 6 -- Procession (4 hours) and worship (2 hours)
 Aug 12 -- music festival at the UCA (Jesuit University)
 Aug 13 -- *F y E*, Ciudadela
 Aug 15 -- Romero's 100th birthday, several worship and cultural activities
 Aug 17 -- *CIS* closing program and fiesta
 Aug 20 -- *F y E*, *La Mora*
 Aug 22 -- *F y E*, *El Calabozo* massacre commemoration
 Aug 24 -- *Las Orquídeas*, annual public reporting and fiesta
 Aug 25 -- birthday B-B-Q at home
 Aug 26 -- Sensuntepeque with former prison inmate (in contact since 1994, released 2 years ago) to explore business opportunity
 Sept 17 -- *La Resurrección*, anniversary
 Sept 17 -- youth excursion / climb
 Sept 23 -- Jayaque ("5 de mayo", "Penzburg")
 Sept 24 -- *F y E* meeting, at *F y E*
 Oct 1 -- *La Resurrección*, *Xolotl* concert
 Oct 5 -- UCA (Jesuit University), forum
 Oct 10, 11 -- Santa Marta, anniversary of first repatriation
 Oct 14 -- Roman Catholic seminar on peace
 Oct 15 -- youth excursion with *CIS*, Cerro Verde, climb Santa Ana Volcano
 Oct 18 -- *Concordia*, Forum on Migration
 Oct 23 -- *Concordia*, *IPAZ* press conference
 Oct 25 -- *Hotel Intercontinental*, Lutheran Forum on Migration
 Oct 27 -- *Orquídeas del Mar*, anniversary fiesta
 Oct 28 -- Axel graduation
 Oct 28 -- Ramiro graduation
 Oct 29 -- *La Resurrección*, Reformation celebration
 Nov 2 -- Day of the Dead, visit to cemeteries
 Nov 5 -- *F y E*, Sumpul River massacre commemoration at site
 Nov 8 - 12 -- *CRISPAZ* Board in El Salvador for annual meeting

Nov 8 - 9 -- Papaturo, Suchitoto
 Nov 11 -- Jesuit vigil, UCA
 Nov 12 -- worship in *Rosario de Mora* (rural home)
 Nov 15 -- *Concordia*, culture day
 Nov 19 -- *F y E* to Ayalitas
 Nov 22 -- presentation and day with ELCA delegation from St. Mark's, San Francisco
 Nov 25 -- Josue Morales, graduation
 Nov 25 -- Hans' birthday party at Christian's guesthouse (with SF delegation)
 Nov 29 -- *Hotel Intercontinental*, Lutheran Forum on martyrdom and the subversive cross
 Dec. 4 -- Synod clergy and staff devotional, I preach and preside
 Dec 5 -- *IPAZ*, press conference
 Dec 7 -- *Hospital Rosales*, International HIV / AIDS Day, mass, program and lunch
 Dec 9 -- *IPAZ* press conference
 Dec 12 - 15 -- Synod pastors and church workers retreat, Tikal, Guatemala
 Dec 16 -- Lutheran University, *Los Guaraguao* (Venezuela) concert
 Dec 20 -- Synod Christmas dinner and program
 Dec 21 -- Ilobasco Intermediate Prison, presentation of inmates' book (one dozen presenters / chapters / exhibition tables), with lunch and chats
 Dec 22 -- *IPAZ* Christmas BBQ fiesta
 Dec 28 -- *F y E*, "Re-Encounter with History", full-day community reunion at *F y E*

These are the events I have noted in my appointment book. A better memory (and Facebook reminders) would alert me to so many more, which aren't included here. Every day brings surprises, most of them pleasant and welcome. I am so grateful to ABT Synod, its leaders and members, for the prayer, moral and financial support. I appreciate your accompaniment, in person or from a distance.

God's blessings and guidance to you and to us all, as we continue in this mission with our Salvadoran sisters and brothers, wherever we and they may be.

Respectfully submitted,
 Brian Rude
 21 February 2018