

Solidaridad



St. Sebastian Parish – One in solidarity with our sistering community in Teosinte, El Salvador.

APRIL 2003

THE COST OF EDUCATION

By David B. Goehner

For, about \$75 per month, Oscar Rutilio Guardado Alas can attend classes at the University of El Salvador. Most of his classes are free. Despite the poverty that is rampant in El Salvador, most education opportunities are relatively free. The quality of the education is overall average.

Yet El Salvador remains one of the most illiterate countries in Central and South America. The problem is not the low cost of education. The problem is that there are few schools ... and the schools are difficult to get to for most Salvadorans. A pervasive attitude by Salvadoran parents is keeping children home to both work for the family income as well as prevent children from becoming educated and moving away.

Rutilio is studying to be an attorney. He has been in college for about four years. He likely has about three years to go before he will graduate. He is an excellent student, and he knows how to argue and present perspectives. I know this ... we shared time and space and laughs and wit and friendship.

Rutilio lives in Teosinte. Many of you may remember his mother, Marta. She visited St. Sebastian about two years ago. Rutilio serves as a youth group leader in Teosinte, and is a regional youth counselor for the Department of Chalatenango, which is where Teosinte is situated. Teosinte is over two hours away, by car or bus, from the University. As a result, Rutilio comes home for a few weekends each month. The remainder of his time he spends in San Salvador.

Rutilio spends \$75 each month to pay for books, food, and a place to live during the weeks when he is attending classes. To be creative, many rural Salvadoran college students sleep in offices in San Salvador after-hours. One year, Rutilio slept on the entryway floor of a social service agency in San Salvador. He told me he got by on at least one meal a day. He saved his money to buy newer clothes that he used when he applied for the job as the regional youth group counselor. Rutilio told me he didn't mind sleeping on a cement floor; he believed getting his degree was worth such an inconvenience.

Salvadoran college students can go a long way on \$75 per month. Salvadoran high school students need about

\$25 dollars per month to attend high school. Certainly, more money would provide them better options. The St. Sebastian Teosinte Committee has been working to organize funding options for the students of Teosinte. The two best scholarship programs that assist Teosinte students require detailed accountability for the students with respect to how they spend their money and the grades they maintain. We hope to do more.

Rutilio loves his education. He will likely go far in his life, by Salvadoran perspective. When I first met Rutilio, I was impressed with his intensity, his passion to learn, his respect for people, and his interest in making the most of his opportunity. My interaction and experience with Rutilio was priceless. It still is.

I think about Rutilio often. Every time I visit a store and purchase a necessity or something of lesser importance, I think of the cost of learning. I am still learning.

A Prayer

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers,
half-truths, and superficial relationships,
so that you will live deep in your heart.
May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression,
and exploitation of people and the earth
so that you will work for justice, equity, and peace.
May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer,
so you will reach out your hands to comfort them
and change their pain into joy.
And may God bless you with the foolishness to think
that you can make a difference in the world,
so you will do the things which
others say cannot be done.

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The "Solidaridad" newsletter will be published four times a year by the members of the Teosinte Committee of St. Sebastian Parish.

Members of the committee include: Holly Clanton, Ann Gehred, David Goehner, Beth Hammer, Judy Hill, Donna Johnson, Charles & Carolyn Kiker, Janice Leach, Daysi C. Mendoza, Diana Mesa-Horaitis, Duane & Mary Pickering, Mary & John Reynolds, Stacy Ko Sondag, Sandra Swietlik.

WHAT DOES SISTERING MEAN TO ME?

Representatives from several sister parishes in the Milwaukee area attempted to define what "sistering" meant. After much discussion, the group was unable to define the concept in one sentence; rather, they identified key characteristics, which include:

- * Reciprocal Cultural Understanding
- * Accompaniment - Physically and Spiritually
- * Shared Beliefs -- A Unity Within Our Diversity
- * Faith – Humility – Vulnerability
- * Advocacy -- working to solve the root of problems; believing that poverty is only a symptom.
- * Communication

Group consensus is that sistering is a complex, a transcultural relationship which blesses all involved with a wide range of miracles. Two of our committee members describe sistering this way:

*“In a familial sense, it means having someone who ‘grew up’ with me (and probably looks a little like me too). It is a special bond that is cemented with shared memories that span many years and many phases of life. There are also a few people in life that I call “sister”. Although we don’t share familial bonds, in many cases we “grew up” together and the bond shared is just as strong or stronger. In a global sense, we all have brothers and sisters who we have either never met or rarely see. The bond that holds our global family together is life – our shared human experiences. So it is with our family in Teosinte, El Salvador. Just as in our biological families, the relationship with our family is not based on a one way exchange of financial resources. It is a relationship rooted in our shared experiences as travelers on the journey of life. Like our biological families and families of friends, St. Sebastian Parish’s relationship with Teosinte is based on a commitment to help one another grow – physically, mentally, and spiritually. Many would agree that for any relationship to grow, it must be cultivated, and cultivation takes time and energy. That’s what “sistering” means – a mutual commitment to take the necessary time, energy, resources to cultivate a relationship that will last many years, through many phases of life. After all, relationships are what life is all about.” – **Beth Hammer***

*“Sistering is a term that describes a relationship. This was difficult for me to grasp until I went on the 1999 delegation to Teosinte. It is actually very easy to describe my experience to you now. To me it means that I am now part of a family – a big sister if you will. Sistering means that the people of Teosinte are always on my mind and in my heart even though I don’t see them everyday. Sistering means that we share our experiences and wisdom with each other. We do not provide things for them – rather we give them the means to provide things for themselves. Sistering means we do not make demands – we work together. Like being a member of any family, we deal with frustrations and limitations – but we don’t give up. Sistering means we speak up/out for our family that has a weak voice. Very simply, sistering means really being there – just like a big brother or sister would be there for their family. – **Holly Clanton***

LOOKING TO PLAN A FAMILY VACATION?

Join the delegation to visit our brothers and sisters in Teosinte, El Salvador from October 16-23, 2003.

Application deadline is May 27, 2003. Small group preparation will begin this summer. Applicants should be willing to continue working to enhance the relationship between Teosinte and St. Sebastian Parish for at least two years after the delegation. Applications can be picked up at the parish office. Please contact Beth (414-774-4934) or Holly (262-532-0603) with any further questions.

TRAVEL PLANS UNDERWAY

The Teosinte committee is currently making travel plans for the trip to El Salvador this October. The largest bulk of the budget is airline tickets. ***This is where your generosity can help save the delegation hundreds or thousands of dollars.*** If you currently have frequent flyer miles for American, Northwest or Continental Airlines, or those from a credit card that you would be willing to donate to our delegation, please contact Holly at 262-532-0603. We would like to confirm our tickets as soon as possible to get the best rates available.

ENJOY A TASTE OF EL SALVADOR

May we introduce to you a local Savadoran Restaurant:

El Salvador Cuisine & Puseria Restaurant
2316 S. 6th Street ♦ 414-383-2039 (Across from the St. Josaphat Basilica)

Open Tuesday through Sunday
10:00a.m. – 10:00 p.m.

TELL THEM THE ST. SEBASTIAN TEOSINTE COMMITTEE SENT YOU!