

Palo Alto Friends Meeting El Salvador Projects

April 2012

www.pafmelsalvadorprojects.org

From the Director, Robert Broz

Dear friends and supporters:

From conversations during my periodic visits to the U.S. and feedback to our Committee members, I know that you look forward to my first-hand observations of social and political conditions in El Salvador. You'll receive our newsletter after the March 11 elections for mayors and assembly members, but as I write the TV, radio, and newspapers are filled with the heat of campaigning. I'll describe changes in election procedures and campaign strategies, and then give you an update on our continuing efforts to improve the lives of Salvadorans in the rural communities where we have worked since 1990.



Nationwide, elections for Assembly and Mayoral positions are held every three years. A new system is being implemented, with multiple voting centers in many municipalities. The idea is to make voting easier because many people will vote at a center closer to their homes. Because Suchitoto, where I live, was one of a handful of municipalities where multiple voting centers were provided in 2009, most people

here know where to vote. In many other parts of the country the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) is working hard to educate the general population, with places where voters can make sure they are actually registered and confirm which of the new voting centers they will use on election day. Although over time this will probably increase voter participation, this year it is confusing for many people who have voted in the same polling place for years.

Campaigning has changed in 2012 also. I have noticed a major difference in the way ARENA, the party of the political right, promotes its candidates, with a new slogan and candidates with a different image. Perhaps as part of the continuing backlash from the 2009 presidential win by the FMLN, the party of the left, ARENA's candidates are portrayed as working class people and ARENA's slogan, *Somos Gente de Trabajo* (We Are Working Class People), is a huge change from the rich elite and big business owners who have traditionally been nominated by ARENA for political positions.

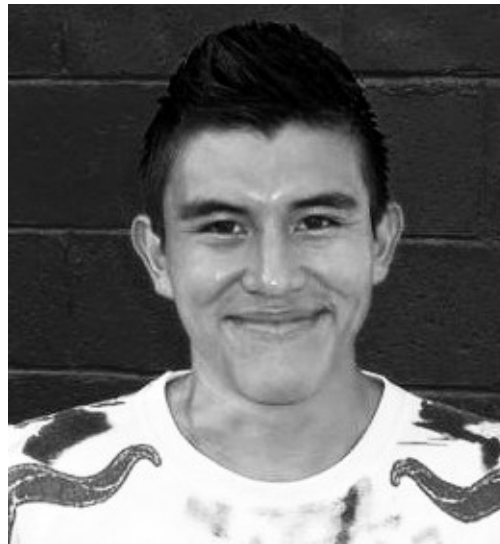
The FMLN, on the other hand, has a good chance of holding onto a large number of the national Assembly seats as well as the majority of city governments. Many are skeptical that the FMLN can win back the capital, San Salvador, after losing in 2009. The current ARENA mayor, Norman Quijano, has made many positive changes that even hard-line leftists find hard to criticize. The building of new market places for street vendors, the cleaning up of the city's historic downtown, and the remodeling and recovery of numerous city parks are just some of the projects that Mr. Quijano has implemented during the last three years. The FMLN's catchy slogan in 2012 is *Sigamos con el Cambio* (Let's Keep Going with the Change). The party and many of its candidates are going strong, even though FMLN President Mauricio Funes has recently been reported to have lost popularity in some public surveys. In my opinion, this popularity decline is due to his Obama-type cam-

paigining and political platform, which has been hard to implement because of the country's poor financial situation when Funes took office back in June of 2009. Later this year, I will update you on the outcome of local elections here in Suchitoto, where for the first time ever a female mayoral candidate for the FMLN is projected to win.

Since late 2011 the economy in El Salvador seems to have improved. That's good news for students who have graduated with support from our projects as well as for other Salvadorans looking for work. Despite that relative improvement, extreme poverty persists in El Salvador. We will continue to apply our limited resources – the contributions you send with such generosity and confidence – where they will bring the greatest benefit. Our emphasis remains on providing financial aid to university students through our interest-free student loan program.

In 2012 we will support 16 continuing university students, five of these from two communities in the northern part of Morazán and 11 from the rural area around Suchitoto. All of our continuing students are doing well in their studies and personal development. Although we received many more applications than we could approve, we were able to include five new students in our program. It is always hard to make the selection from the capable, eager students who apply, and this year was no exception. Our local committee looked at everything from academic records to the economic situation of each of the 14 applicants. Of the five new students, the top two come from the high school La Ciudadela in the southern part of the municipality, two come from the high school in El Barío where our projects began, and one is from the school in Los Almendros.

As usual, I want to introduce you to one of our students. Young **Oscar Fidel**, first on our list of new students for 2012, is a bright young man from the community La Ciudadela Dr. Guillermo Manuel



Oscar Fidel

Ungo, located just about 8 kilometers south of the city center. Oscar Fidel was selected for one of our new sponsoring donors, who wanted to provide financial aid to someone

from one of the poorest families in Suchitoto. All of the students we have supported come from poor families, but our policy has always been that the family must put enough importance on the education of their children to make financial sacrifices. We know through the studies we make every couple of years that it costs a university student between \$1600 and \$1800 for each year of study. Students in our program receive \$1000 over the school year, plus the opportunity to live in one of the two student homes we rent and equip with basic furnishings, computers, and Internet, thus reducing their annual expenses by around \$200/year. After realizing that many students were not applying for financial aid because the families were too poor to help with their children's university expenses at all, we started working together with several other programs, especially in the area of Suchitoto where five other scholarship and loan programs exist, and also with individuals who support specific communities and/or families. For the past two years we have started pairing up needed students with financial aid from various programs, and this year four of our 21 students also receive half scholarships from three different programs. Oscar Fidel is not one of those. He will receive a full loan in the amount of \$1800, which we calculate will cover all of the costs of his university studies. The only male child in a family of five, he lives with his mother, grandmother,

and two younger sisters. Neither his mother nor his grandmother has land to work, owning only their small lot with an adobe, mud-floored house. Fidel's mother rents land to plant the little corn and beans they will eat during the year. Always talented at drawing, Fidel has decided to pursue a study program in Plastic Arts at the National University with a specialty in graphic design. Fidel had also been approved to receive a small scholarship from a group in Santa Cruz, California, but when he learned that he would be receiving a full loan from our program he relinquished the other scholarship, allowing it to be given to another needy student from his community. For Fidel, as for other new students, it is challenging to adapt from their studies at academically weak public high schools to university studies and life in the city with all its distractions. With a strong high school record and good performance on both the high school exit exam and the university entrance exam, Fidel will begin his university studies with a good academic foundation. Please join me as I hold him in the light, praying that he has the will and discipline he will need to succeed at the university and in life.

I am pleased to end this report with the news that I will be in the U.S. from early May through late June, looking forward to meeting as many of you as I can and talking with you personally about El Salvador and our projects. With Committee members Jamie and Marion Newton, I will attend Intermountain Yearly Meeting in New Mexico June 10-17. Members of the El Salvador Projects Committee of Palo Alto Friends Meeting will be scheduling meetings for me in the periods May 9-June 10 and June 18-22. If you would like to arrange an event, please contact Mary Pat O'Connell (650-941-8287) or Trudy Reagan (650-856-9593).

Finally, we will continue our very successful series of service learning trips to El Salvador with another in 2012. Even though you may receive this after our early bird registration deadline of April 1,

there still may be openings for this year's trip for teens and adults, scheduled for July 21 through August 5. If you or someone you know is interested, you can find out more online at www.pafmelsalvadorprojects.org, or by contacting Barbara Babin at quakeryouthtrips@yahoo.com or me at rpbroz@gmail.com

Peace to all, and thanks for having faith and continuing to support our work here in El Salvador!

—Robert Broz



Barbara Babin and Nely, a student



Art student Chomingo receives a paint donation

Come with us this Summer!

We are very excited to announce that our service-learning trip to El Salvador for young people and young-at-heart adults is coming up from July 21 -August 5, 2012. We invite you to join us and to spread the word to others who might be interested. We suggest that you read through our on-line packet of information and make your decision early, as we will only be able to accommodate 13-16 participants, plus 4-5 bilingual adult chaperones/guides/translators from the U.S. and El Salvador.



Rose Hinson, a participant, gets in the microbus

We keep our groups deliberately small to build intimacy and bonding, to do daily reflections, and also so that we can fit our entire group and their luggage into the microbuses and truck transports and to make sure there is space for everyone when we spend the night in private homes and community buildings.

Each of our trips offers a wonderful opportunity to see what it is like to live in a developing country and to learn of the role that the US had in that country's history. We focus on visiting the communities which have projects that have been supported by Palo Alto Friends Meeting, under the oversight of Carmen Broz and the El Salvador Committee. This year we will be based in the area of Suchitoto, El Salvador, visiting almost daily as well as spending two night home-stays, one each week with families of one of the communities where we have been working since 1989. We hope that with two weeks based in one area and working principally with one community our trip participants will have a much greater opportunity to build connections with the members of the community where we have

worked for the longest time! During the two-week stay we will also meet some of our University students and youth from other communities where Palo Alto Friends Meeting's "El Salvador Projects" work.

Total cost for the trip is \$1275 plus airfare. The \$1275 includes all meals, entrance fees, and ground transportation. Participants will experience daily life in a developing country through home-stays and visits to rural communities to work and meet with youth and community leaders; 18-20 hours of conversational Spanish instruction, with opportunities to use language in authentic settings; 30-35 hours of service work learning about Salvadoran history and culture, as well as the effects of United States involvement in Central America, and the political climate of today; some sightseeing and some play daily; reflection or worship-sharing in the manner of Friends (Quakers); plus a day at the beach!

Applications and initial deposits will be due by May 1. Trip organizer, Barbara Babin, will be happy to assist travelers with their air travel arrangements.

For more information:

<http://www.pafmelsalvadorprojects.org/2012Servicelearning.htm>

Barbara Babin quakeryouthtrips@yahoo.com or 650-454-0216



Americans and Salvadorans playing games together

How you can help:

Donate your old reading glasses and laptop computers:

Many people in rural El Salvador have no way to get glasses when their eyes begin to weaken in middle age, so they can no longer read or do such work as sewing and small repairs. Our **Project AGE** (Adults, Glasses, and Education – or in Spanish, Adultos, Gafas, y Educación) pro-



A recent picture of Carmen Broz, projects founder

vides reading glasses to Salvadoran seniors and offers community skills-training workshops led by the young adults we help to educate. Older people who can see clearly are able to regain independence and productivity.

The drugstore reading glasses

that crowd your drawers and shelves because they are no longer right for you or your family members can transform lives for seniors in El Salvador!

University students in El Salvador need to use computers for their academic work and Internet access – but computers are not routinely available in libraries and computer labs as they are on most U.S. campuses. *A laptop that is no longer adequate for you can open a world of options in the houses we rent for university students supported by our education loans.* (Requirements: Windows PC, Pentium IV or faster CPU; working, but defective keyboard is OK.)

Please send glasses and laptops to David Hinson (Tel. 650-857-0232), 3298 Ramona, Palo Alto, CA 94306.

Donate money... of course!

More than 95% of each dollar donated goes directly to our projects. Our administrative expenses are very minor (for example, printing and mailing this newsletter). We rely on your generosity to provide loans to students from poor rural communities, help younger students attend elementary and high school, co-sponsor an annual university fair where students learn about opportunities and programs that are open to them, and continue all the rest of the activities you read about in our newsletters. You make it all possible!

Yes I want to help offer access to education at all levels in El Salvador!

Mail to: Palo Alto Friends Meeting—El Salvador Projects, 957 Colorado Avenue, Palo Alto, CA 94303

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY– STATE - ZIP _____

EMAIL Dave Hinson, davidphinson@yahoo.com, if you want to receive your newsletter as a PDF, or special bulletins.

\$25 \$50 \$75 \$100 Other: _____

Check here if you want your gift to support a college student

(Please specify on your check memo line “College Loans”)

\$250 \$500 \$1,000

Donations will be used for general programs, unless you state another preference.

Contribution checks should be made to PAFM – E.S. Projects. Your contribution is tax-deductable.



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www.pafmelsalvadorprojects.org

April 2012 Newsletter—*WHAT'S INSIDE:*

Robert Broz—*Director's report*

- Current Salvadoran situation
- Introducing aid student Oscar Fidel

Information on our 2012 Summer Trip!

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Address correction requested