

El Salvador 2015
NYYM / Powell House Youth Service Trip

Smiles. Connections.
Care and concern for others.
Joys and sorrows at the same time.

Thirteen youth and three leaders from the New York Yearly Meeting / Powell House youth program spent two weeks working in El Salvador. We stayed in the Centro Arte para La Paz (Art Center for Peace) in Suchitoto and spent five nights in individual homes in El Barrio. El Barrio is a rural community that was resettled during the civil war after the people had fled from the army.

We had three purposes:

1. to experience daily life in a Central American country;
2. to continue the service work of Palo Alto Friends Meeting in the rural communities;
3. to learn about the civil war and the peace and reconciliation work healing the communities.

We did a variety of service projects, about 37 hours per participant:

- preparing and teaching English classes in the El Barrio school. English is a required subject, but there are no qualified teachers at the school. They appreciate the periodic assistance of visitors through the Palo Alto program.
- Painting in the Santa Anita community. The El Barrio youth went with us to Santa Anita, which many had never visited even though it is relatively close.
- Making a concrete floor in the El Barrio communal youth building. Sand was hauled by hand from the bottom of the hill. Dirt was shoveled out and our group learned from the local youth how to mix concrete by hand.

The local youth also prepared 25 hours of English classes for our NYYM youth, a “reverse” service project. The local youth also went with our group to visit the Oscar Romero memorials and other civil war sites. Most of them have been born since the war ended, so it was a way for them to get insights about their own history as well.

Our service work funds were spent in three different areas:

- 1) the Cooperative of Santa Anita where we spent around \$600 on supplies for the day care center and materials to paint the day care center and communal building,
- 2) Support to the public school in El Barrio where we spent \$1,200 for
 - supplies for the English classes and other student needs at the school,
 - the new hand steel hand rail around the kindergarten area,

- roof repair in the high school class room area,
 - a repair to the main gate (the iron hinge broke as we came in and we asked the man fixing the railing to fix it also).
- 3) support with the new youth building in El Barrio where funds went to stucco, cement to start the floor and to install a new door. (\$435)

Sharing the daily lives of our new friends became an intense experience of contrasts. There was a great deal of fun - waterfalls, group games, hiking, dancing, songs and music, street markets, a small town carnival set up as we watched, soccer games. There were hardships – the village water supply failed during our first home visits, oppressive heat and humidity, bouts of parasites, dehydration, a sprained foot, and the newly arrived *chikungunya* virus. (Yes, a couple people brought some back.)

There were sorrows. Every family we met had their stories and histories from the civil war. Many families discussed their current losses to the gang violence that has gripped the whole nation. We met young people who had been deported back from our own USA after they had gone there to flee direct threats of violence from gangs. We shared meals with people as they told us of sons and daughters being killed. And as they told us of how life goes on.

We came back transformed.



Reviewing the week's English vocabulary...

A Spanish class delivered under the community fig tree ...

And every break time needs a bugle player!



Santa Anita Cooperative and Community Preschool

We combined forces with the El Bario youth group and Santa Anita community members of all ages to paint the preschool building, renew the murals and paint the community center. Our donations paid for paint and brushes. We also donated classroom supplies for the preschool.





Our local transportation



Outdoor lunch for everyone painting together at the Santa Anita Cooperative



Our donations paid for this new railing by the kindergarten classroom



It is strong enough to support friends hanging out and it keeps the little ones inside the fence.

A nun explained Monsenor Oscar Romero's story to us and showed us his simple house and small car. The clothes he was wearing when he was shot are on display here. We also visited the altar where he was shot.



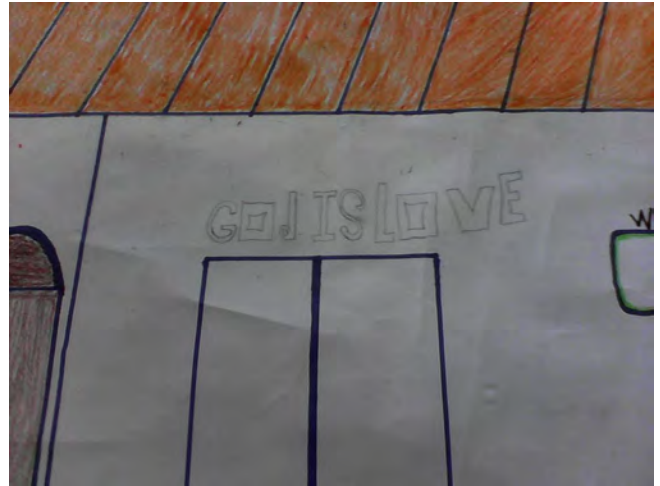
The church at the University of Central America, site of the killing of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter.



Hannah translating as our guide prepares us to look at photo albums from the violence against the people during the civil war.



The photos on the wall are the Maryknoll Sisters killed by the military. We had no answers for how people can do these things to their neighbors.



We asked the sixth graders to draw a picture of their community and label it in English. These boys had been reluctant to participate all week.

This is what the “tough” kid wrote:

God is Love.

