

**God shattered those plans;  
Ministry reaches out to needy, students of El Salvador**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

LAM News Service

San Salvador, El Salvador (LAMNS)—It's a long way from Palestine to El Salvador. But, as Lori Macklin, a missionary with the Latin America Mission, has discovered, God sometimes has us travel a long distance to arrive at where He wants us.

“My first calling to work overseas was a trip to Israel and Palestine during my sophomore year of college,” the Joliet, Illinois, native says. “I went there to see the holy sites, but I was much more affected by what was happening behind me as we were looking at shrines,” Lori remembers, referring to the violence and oppression that she witnessed there.

“I felt called to go and work with less fortunate people. Then, I went to Africa to work on a news story on AIDS in Uganda and I thought that God had called us there. But, God shattered those plans and showed me that He had something else for me.”

Today, Lori and her husband Chris, who are members of First Presbyterian Church in Berkeley, California, are serving the Lord in El Salvador, working with a Christian development agency and providing a sports program in a Christian school.

The couple arrived in El Salvador shortly after the devastating earthquakes of January and February, 2001. They immediately plunged into helping people rebuild their community and lives. That experience taught them something about the dynamics in this poor Central American country.

“I've noticed that there is a common bond now between the rich and the poor,” explains Chris, a native of Warren, Ohio. “We find churches both poor and rich standing next to each other. I've been told that in the past this was not common.”

“This is a common point of suffering that brings solidarity that only trauma can bring,” adds Lori. “It brings people to that point that they need each other. They have the same fears, now that the rich have actually lived in the common fear that they can't control things or pay to have them go away.”

Lori, who previously worked for World Vision in the United States, is helping a local Christian development agency, ENLACE, to raise funds for various projects, including potable water systems, housing projects and other outreach endeavors.

ENLACE was formed to help support local churches in becoming effective ministers in their community according to Ron Bueno the founder and co-director of the organization. “What makes us different is that we really believe that it's the local church that has a bigger vision of what ministry is,” Bueno explains. “When we talk about community development, we're not talking about just putting in a water system or starting a

microenterprise project. We are talking about those projects as a means to a greater end is which building community in the biblical sense.”

Bueno, who grew up in El Salvador where his parents served as Assemblies of God missionaries, says that, “our primary purpose for being is to support the local church in becoming effective ministers in their community.”

The response among El Salvadorian churches has been strong Bueno says. “We do not do any promotion, churches come to us. We have ten pastors waiting for next year.”

The organization works alongside a church that is looking for innovative ways to reach their community. “We will accompany the church after they have organized and started to build community internally,” Bueno explains. “We will help them to reach out and understand the community’s difficulties. Then, we help them create a long-term plan to resolve these situations.”

Chris and Lori linked up with ENLACE’s disaster work in the rural community of Tinteral where over 90% of the houses were destroyed in the earthquakes. “The earthquakes affected everybody in the country,” Chris remembers.

“When we arrived to help with the emergency, almost everybody was suffering and most were homeless,” says Doris Evangelista De Leon, coordinator of ENLACE's community-building program. “We helped to facilitate permanent housing and to coordinate the housing.” ENLACE worked with World Relief to construct temporary houses in the community.

“The community identified their own needs and we helped them organize to meet those needs,” remembered Doris. “We are working on the future. We think that in the long run, the community here may be able to help other locations with the vision of working together.”

At the heart of these efforts is reaching people for Jesus Christ. “I think it is important for us to work with other organizations and let them see what a difference it makes to have Christ as the center of your mission,” explains Lori. “I think that evangelism is not just reaching the unreached, but reaching other organizations as well.”

“Evangelism is immersed in our work,” affirms Doris. “When we first came here, the greeting was ‘may God bless you.’ The people identified us as Christian workers.”

Doris says that many people in the communities have come back to the church and other people have accepted Christ.

Meanwhile, Chris is witnessing for Christ in another setting, Liceo Cristiano, a large evangelical school system where he is setting up a sports program. “There is not a really structured curriculum, so I’m going to be writing it,” he reports. “We will pilot it at one school and in five to ten years it will be system-wide.”

“We are using sports for evangelistic purposes,” he explains. “Being the coach or leader of the program, kids get interested in what you do. It’s driven by example, they notice and watch everything and begin to ask questions and listen to what you have to say.”

ENLACE (the word in Spanish means “link”) is looking for additional missionaries. “We need lots of volunteers and resources,” Bueno says. “We need farmers, technicians, financial planners and community advisors. They need to have a two to three year commitment”

The organization also needs financial donations to provide capital for lending programs, developing new crops and opening up markets for local products.

Since ENLACE is an official Associate Ministry of the Latin America Mission, those interested in donating or serving as missionaries can inquire through the LAM office in Miami.

Chris and Lori are trusting that their work in El Salvador will have repercussions far beyond this Central American country. “We want to help people in North America really understand that everything we do and buy and have in our lives affects someone else,” Lori says. “All of our choices have an affect on someone else whether we recognize that or not.”

Latin America Mission works in partnership with churches and Christian agencies throughout Latin America and supports missionaries and projects in many Latin countries as well as in Spain. LAM is seeking to place new missionaries throughout the region. The U.S. headquarters can be reached at Latin America Mission, Box 52-7900, Miami, FL 33152, by e-mail at [info@lam.org](mailto:info@lam.org), or by calling 1-800-275-8410. The mission’s web site may be found at <http://www.lam.org>. LAM’s Canadian office is at 3075 Ridgeway Drive, Unit 14, Mississauga, ON L5L 5M6.

Related web links:

<http://www.lam.org>

<http://www.enlaceonline.org/>

**SIDEBAR:**

ENLACE is a Christian agency helping to improve the lives of people in El Salvador. The word ENLACE means “link” in Spanish. That name is an exact description of what this organization is doing in this Central American country.

“The idea is to equip, prepare churches and link them to other groups,” explains founder and co-director Ron Bueno who grew up as an MK in El Salvador. “Sometimes we link them to a school system or our credit union or another organization which can partner with them to address a need.”

“We work with a local church to create a lay committee that works alongside the pastor to understand and reach out to the community,” Bueno says. “We help them understand what the specific needs are, what opportunities exist, and help them to create a long-term plan to resolve it. We see ourselves as consultants to the local church.”

Bueno says that ENLACE tries to maintain a flexible structure to address small needs as well as large ones.

“After Hurricane Mitch, Habitat for Humanity helped with a small community. But, the people needed a bridge to get supplies across a stream. We provided \$1,500 to build the bridge. That had a huge impact.”

Even though his organization works in the midst of heart-rending poverty and hardship, Bueno says that he finds great satisfaction and joy in his work. “For me, the fun thing is to see a church capture a new vision of integrated ministry in their community.”

“The exciting thing in Tinteral (a town almost destroyed by earthquakes in January and February, 2001) was to see the church, which had such a heart to help their community, take the steps to integrate with other churches and with community members to create one committee that serves the whole area,” Bueno says.

The missionary says that he was touched by watching Christian members of one town committee take themselves out of consideration for a new house. “It was moving to see people say they would give up their rights, being a board member and not using that authority to get a house. Rather, they were saying they were going to do what Christ would have done and let someone else have it.”

Reflecting on Christian witness in the midst of meeting human needs, Bueno explains, “We need to understand that evangelism is both proclaiming in word and doing in deeds. As they reach out into their communities they are speaking about Christ in specific ways.”

Bueno relates a story once told to him by an El Salvadorian pastor. “If I take a person a bag of corn, they will talk with me for hours,” the pastor said. “Now, imagine building a permanent relationship with these people where they see that you really care for them in the long term.”

Bueno says, “This is about the body of Christ working together to point to God.”

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