

THE MUSTARD SEED



Denver Justice & Peace Committee
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Denver Justice and Peace Committee
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Monseñor Romero's Legacy Lives

By Gabriela Flora

On March 24, Salvadorans and people around the world will commemorate the life and legacy of Monseñor Romero on the 30th anniversary of his assassination.

Many priests, in addition to thousands of civilians, were murdered in El Salvador by the military government funded and trained by the United States. Romero stands out because he was part of the oligarchy, entrenched in the power of the church and state. He was chosen as archbishop of San Salvador in 1977 because it was believed that he would tout the conservative government line, rein in the priests supportive of the working class, and turn a blind eye to the violence in the name of "fighting communism." Romero's career was advancing in the conservative hierarchy, but the injustice of what he witnessed led him to risk all, to the point of death, to speak out against inequality, exploitation, injustice and extreme violence.

My husband, Jim Walsh, and I had the privilege in January to spend 11 days in El Salvador with students from Romero House at Regis University. The trip was a pilgrimage exploring the life



Gabriela Flora and Jim Walsh are welcomed at Romero's house



Romero House delegation at Romero's tomb

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Regis University's Romero House

By Kathryn Brisnehan
Regis University Ministry

Romero House is a Regis University student residence located in the Highlands neighborhood of northwest Denver. Inspired by the lives and sacrifices of Jesuits working with the poor in Central America, Fr. Vince O'Flaherty, S.J., established Romero House in 1992. The house is named for Archbishop Oscar Romero who was murdered in 1980 for his work with the poor in El

Salvador. Students have the opportunity to make connections between their faith, education, experience of service in the community, and the life experience of the poor. Students who participate in both the summer and academic year programs have the opportunity to travel to El Salvador in order to better understand Romero's life and legacy. To learn more visit the University Ministry web site at www.regis.edu. Click on "Spirituality" then "Intentional Communities" and then "Romero House".

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MISSION STATEMENT

Denver Justice and Peace Committee is a volunteer organization dedicated to promoting human rights, economic justice, and lasting peace in Latin America through education, solidarity projects, and nonviolent activism.

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Message From the DJPC Board

Dear friends in the struggle for economic justice in Latin America,

As we approach the 30th anniversary of the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero on March 24, we are reminded of the consciousness raising that occurred in the U.S., especially in America's churches, about the abuses of power occurring in Latin America often with the support of the U.S. government.

Not satisfied to share the riches they squeezed out of the land and from the poor, the privileged classes resorted to scare tactics to maintain their privilege. When workers organized to secure a living wage or to own a small piece of previously unused land owned by rich patrons (land owners) or companies like United Fruit, the privileged went beyond directing official law enforcement by the police or the military to enforce the laws of the governments they dominated—they employed vigilantes (death squads) to torture and kill activists. It wasn't until death squads killed their own archbishop, American nuns, and then American priests that the alarm bells went off across America. We at DJPC will join others to commemorate the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero on March 23, 7:30 pm at St. Dominic Church, 29th Avenue and Federal Blvd. Please join us.

The remembrance of Archbishop Romero's stand against economic injustice has encouraged DJPC to focus its collective efforts to highlight current issues of economic justice identified at our February planning retreat: violence against women, the exploitation of natural resources by foreign corporations, the ongoing conflict over U.S. immigration policies, the exploitation by U.S. free trade policies, etc. We are now involved in a discernment process to ascertain which of these we might have the best chance of influencing a positive outcome. Part of this discernment involves determining where national organizations are focusing their energies these days.

At our retreat, we also realized that we have no comfortable way of involving our members and potential new members in the fellowship of other progressives and in hearing about the diverse activities and efforts of DJPC, so we decided to host quarterly social meetings where folks intimately involved with us, as well as supporters and collaborators, can come together in a social setting for a pot luck, a picnic, a party, etc. Our first fellowship/information sharing event will be Friday, April 30. Pencil us in for that date. Later you will receive more detailed information. We look forward to greeting and visiting with you personally at that time.

We hope many of you were able to join us at our March 18 salon featuring current efforts to close the School of the Americas in Fort Benning Georgia. So many of our members and friends have travelled to Columbus, Georgia, to demonstrate against this blatant effort of the U.S. government by training their militaries from Latin America to torture and kill their upstart activists. The struggle continues.

In solidarity,

Tommy Timm

Hope Springs Eternal in El Salvador

By Patty Lawless

El Salvador today remains a mixture of incredible hope and almost insurmountable challenges.

The election of Mauricio Funes is juxtaposed against a continuing economic crisis and gang violence that is tearing away at the social fabric of this “pueblo trabajador que nunca se da por vencido”—this hard working people who never give up the fight.

Eighteen years after the signing of the Peace Accords, the statistics continue to be alarming. According to UNICEF, over 30% of the population remains below poverty level. Another 30-40% are living below a decent living standard. According to the Salvadoran government, monthly basic food costs for a family of four are currently \$170.61, while the monthly minimum wage is \$207.68 in the business sector, and \$173.78 in the textile sector. Add housing, health care, education and clothing costs, and the vast majority of Salvadorans are coping on far below a livable wage.

Funes, the first FMLN-elected President in history, has won over the hearts of the vast majority of the Salvadoran poor through his populist policies. In his first year in office, he has made health care and education more accessible by eliminating co-pays and providing school supplies and uniforms to students. While these quick fixes make people feel good, the broader economic and social reforms required to turn the country around will be harder to move forward.

Funes has made significant headway toward his vision of a more just social order in El Salvador by working with the National Assembly to create a pluralist majority, lead by the FMLN, in alliance with other moderate parties. With this majority, he has been able to override the traditional right wing voting block lead by the ARENA party. He has been able to pass the national budget and other significant legislation that would have historically been blocked by ARENA.

Addressing gang violence is a horse of a different color. El

Salvador has been plagued by this issue for years. During the presidency of Francisco Flores (1999-2004), El Salvador adopted the Mano Dura (the “Heavy Hand” or “Iron Fist”) policy—promising to wipe out gangs. His successor, Tony Saca (2004-2009) elevated the policy to the Super Mano Dura—but the gangs only got stronger.

Funes has inherited a social problem that is indisputably out of control, with El Salvador’s homicide rate among the highest in the world. The Salvadoran people are counting on Funes to be able to figure out how to address this issue and take care of his pueblo.

Clearly, Funes, still the shining beacon of progressive change for El Salvador, has his work cut out for him. With four years and two months left in his Presidency (out of a five-year term), hope springs eternal for the people of El Salvador.

Patty Lawless is the Project Coordinator of Project Salvador. In 2001, she received DJPC’s John Proctor Member of the Year Award.

(Continued from page 1)

and legacy of Archbishop Romero, the reality of military rule, support from the U.S. in the devastation, and the current reality of an FMLN president and hope for a better future. I could not help but realize the underlying current of immigration in all of this.

Beginning with a visit to Divina Providencia, Archbishop Romero’s home and the chapel where he was assassinated, to the site of his tomb in the basement of the Cathedral, Romero’s spirit accompanied us as we met Salvadoran people and learned of their experiences in the war and how they have coped since the Peace Accords.

Monseñor Romero’s

spirit is transformative. The act that led Archbishop Romero to refute the rhetoric of the government and military was the assassination of his dear friend, Rutilio Grande, a Jesuit priest who lived among and supported the people in their daily struggles against violence, both economic and physical (as the two were intimately tied together). After Fr. Grande’s murder, Romero refused to officiate at any government sanctioned event and became the “voice for the voiceless.” On his weekly radio program, he described the atrocities experienced by his parishioners and named the murderers—a powerful act in a country where the media was controlled by the economic elite.

Romero’s transformation is central to his legacy.

His former friends tried to dismiss his voice, but it was strengthened by the spirit of the people. So, through his radio program and outreach to communities, he supported their organizing and empowerment in comunidades de base.

While rooted in a hierarchical church perspective, he was transformed by the Salvadoran people and their struggle. Romero came to believe in the living church—where God rests not in a vested few, but rather in the actions, beliefs and struggles of the common people; where God’s work is not in preparing for heaven, but in ending poverty and working for justice

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The Wire Fence (An Excerpt)

By Sarah Sloane

The naming of the dead begins. It goes on for hours in the rain.

Several speakers take turns reading aloud the names of hundreds of men, women, children, and babies murdered by Latin American soldiers trained right here, at the School of Americas. Some of the dead's names are unknown, and they are acknowledged as such:

CHILD, 7 years old, daughter of Julia Claros; CHILD, 7 months old, daughter of Leonisia Claros and Fabian Luna. On the small white crosses we carry are the names of more dead, all people murdered by soldiers trained at the SOA/WHINSEC. After each name is read, we raise our crosses and chant: **¡PRESENTE!**

There are many Central Americans among us bearing witness. A small boy wearing a clear plastic poncho on his father's shoulders looks at the thousands of us protesting. **¡PRESENTE!**, his father says.

A Buddhist monk wearing orange robes, his hands clasped behind his back, joins the protestors' chant.

¡PRESENTE! The guys at the Free Food stand, their dreadlocks frizzy from humidity, stand under their makeshift tarp in their Grateful Dead shirts.

¡PRESENTE! A woman wearing political buttons for everything from peace to ending nuclear power is part too. **¡PRESENTE!**

An elderly man in a black top hat sitting in a lawn chair making a peace sign.

¡PRESENTE!

Our steady chant of **¡PRESENTE!** mingles with the heavy sound of the rain on tarps, on top of a plywood coffin, our anoraks, our baseball caps and wool hats—and the rain's drumbeat is picked up by real drums beating as a funeral procession snakes through the crowd. A man dressed as a skeleton and carrying a large banner saying **STUDY WAR NO**

MORE leads the procession.

Protesters carrying large corrugated cardboard signs declaring **PAZ** and **HOPE** and **RECUERDO** come next. The crowd parts for the puppetistas carrying larger-than-life figures of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her 14-year-old daughter massacred in El Salvador on November 16, 1989 by government troops trained at the SOA. **¡PRESENTE!**

Our voices are steady and never rise even as a military helicopter climbs out of a parking lot right next to us. Its flat blades whack the air, thuk-thuk-thuk, in a muffled bass note that folds into itself as a sound,

exhuming of the dead and collective remembering, this standing shoulder to shoulder with those who have been tortured, killed, disappeared. **¡PRESENTE!** With each naming there is a lateral movement in the air, a difficult going forward that parallels our slow progress on the ground. **¡PRESENTE!** Over and over I say the word, walking towards the place where each protester adds his or her white cross to the hundreds of crosses already woven into the wire fence, at the edge of an army base, in the rain. This is the alchemy of grief transformed into action, a

model of protest believing its own quiet endurance, its remembering the dead, will one day lead to justice.

DJPC members Sarah Sloane, Jane Covode, Denise Peine, Kathryn Rodriguez, and Tommy Timm joined 20,000 other protesters in a vigil outside of the School of Americas/ Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (SOA/WHINSEC) in November 2009.



By Sarah Sloane

SOA Protester

threatens

to drown out our voices. But as the helicopter climbs our voices do not rise, too; we just continue to say that important word after each name. **¡PRESENTE!** I cannot adequately express the power of this simple gesture, this verbal

Reflections from Guatemala

By Ashley Williamson

Have you ever felt small? I mean looking-up-at-a-vast-night-sky-filled-with-stars kind of small. I am talking about the stand-on-the-beach-watching-the-ocean-stretch-for-miles kind of small. I am referring to the kind of small that leaves you feeling overwhelmed, humble, frustrated, while also hopeful and inspired. This has been the experience of my first month and a half with Equipo Movil/Mobile Team as the CAMINOS Accompanier.

Frustration and the feeling of being overwhelmed come from situations such as the one my coordinator and I had in western Guatemala. We went to meet with communities struggling against a powerful international electric company that has overcharged its customers, discontinued service to entire communities including hospitals and other community buildings, and used the military and police when conducting business in the communities to assert authority and instill fear in the people and their leaders.

The people in these communities want to build a hydroelectric dam in order to control the source of their electricity. As if struggling against a large transnational isn't difficult enough, it seems that almost every time an inspiring leader unites the people, he or she is killed, often in broad daylight without fear of consequences on the part of the killers. It is in moments like these, when accompaniment seems insufficient.

Dissuasion, the key

element of accompaniment, assumes that the presence of international accompaniers acts to deter human rights abuses. In theory, this international attention pressures key actors, like the electric company, to respect people's rights or be held accountable by international governing bodies, organizations and other affected governments.

Yet, when the perpetrators act without fear of consequences, there is no way to hold them accountable, and the power of dissuasion no longer exists. This web of impunity threatens the safety of those we accompany, as well as our own. If those who



Ashley Williamson and young Guatemalan friends

are here to help are forced to abandon their work, will the people ever be able to escape their suffering? I don't know—I've never felt so small...

I have made many visits to the office of the Association of the Families of Detained and Disappeared Persons of Guatemala (FAMDEGUA) which has been working on the case of the Dos Erres massacre. The Interamerican Court of Human Rights ruling—which acknowledged the obstruction of justice by Guatemala, obligated it to pay \$3.1 million to victims and their families, and reactivated the arrest warrants for the accused—gave FAMDEGUA and the victims a renewed hope for justice.

This movement, however, brings with it more risk, therefore we accompany them. While not appearing to be much, I have oddly enough found value in the simplicity of being present with them as they work. There is no glamour in this work. We simply observe the office and neighborhood for potential threats against them. FAMDEGUA has received numerous threats in the past. We are accompanying them after this recent ruling to affirm the international community's continued interest in and commitment to tearing apart the fabric of impunity. We have developed good relationships with the staff and built trust. Our work seems simple, but every time I am in the office its value stares back at me from 50+ faces.

In the office, we are all accompanied by more than 50 black and white portraits of people disappeared during the internal armed conflict. In the glimmer in their eyes and the smiles on their faces, I find value in the simplicity of sitting there among them. Our work provides moral support and allows FAMDEGUA to do the challenging work of bringing justice to the family members of those killed at Dos Erres and the disappeared. And though I feel small in the presence of this staff of strong, passionate women, I find great worth in being part of this greater quest for justice.

It has been almost a year since I last stepped foot on the beach and gazed at the endless miles of ocean. It has been even longer since I last slept under the night sky sprinkled with stars. In the same way that the majestic ocean and expansive sky inspire a unique sense of wonder and hope in our smallness, I have found that hope in accompaniment—in being a small part of the larger movement for a more peaceful and just world.

Advocacy Update

By Mindy Mann

During the winter months the Advocacy Committee has been diligently advocating for human rights and economic justice in Latin America and encouraging social justice for Latin Americans living in the U.S., specifically in regards to immigration reform.

DJPC has continued to work on H.R. 2567, the Latin America Military Training Review Act, which would suspend operations of the SOA/WHINSEC, assess military training in Latin America and investigate past human rights abuses associated with the former SOA. Currently, H.R. 2567 is in the first phase of the legislative process; it has been referred to committee for investigation and revisal. DJPC's phone campaign last summer prompted Rep. Diana DeGette and Rep. Jared Polis to cosponsor the bill. However, the remaining five Colorado Representatives have yet to support the bill. The Advocacy Committee is planning a targeted phone campaign in April, to coincide with SOA Watch's Legislative Advocacy Days in Washington, for those residing in House Districts 3, 4 and 7. As always, DJPC encourages you to send a letter, call or email your representative to support H.R. 2567 or thank them for their sponsorship.

Recent actions taken by the Advocacy Committee include:

- Partnered with American Friends Service Committee in the Immigration Reform Postcard Campaign, in which over 5,000 postcards urging humane and comprehensive immigration reform were collected and personally delivered to the entire Colorado delegation.

- Submitted letters to and called all Colorado Representatives, urging them to sign onto a "Dear Colleague" letter, requesting that Secretary of State Clinton and President Obama reconfigure U.S. aid to Columbia to favor humanitarian assistance over military funding.

- Wrote President Obama to oppose U.S. support of election in Honduras and to demand that the U.S. acknowledge and condemn the human rights abuses being perpetrated in Honduras.

- Signed onto the CISPES letter which condemned the assassinations of three environmental activists protesting mining exploration in Cabañas, El Salvador.

- Wrote Pacific Rim to oppose its mining practices in El Salvador and its suit against El Salvador being filed under CAFTA.

- Wrote Secretary of State Clinton requesting her support for a Freedom of Information application surrounding U.S. complicity in the disappearance of Father James "Guadalupe" Carney in Honduras in 1983.

- Signed on with Families for Freedom in N.Y. to request the release of Jean Montrevil from ICE detention and stop his deportation to Haiti. He was released approximately two weeks later.

- Thanked President Obama for granting temporary protected status (TPS) to Haitians following the earthquake and encouraging him to suspend the interdiction at sea policy.

DJPC Events

As a means of communicating the many great things that are happening all around the state, we have begun to produce a Weekly Colorado Events Listing. It includes events sponsored and co-sponsored by DJPC as well as other community events.

If you would like to have an event included, please send an email including event title, date, time, location, sponsoring organization (s), and contact information, and a brief summary of the event, to: weeklyevents@denjustpeace.org

Please contact djpc@denjustpeace.org to receive our events listing.

Book Reviews: Mountains Beyond Mountains by Tracy Kidder and The Uses of Haiti by Paul Farmer

Reviewed by Lynn Farquhar

Tracy Kidder's *Mountains Beyond Mountains* is a work of tremendous empathy, courage, passion and urgency that not only informs but inspires. It brings to life the story of the legendary Dr. Paul Farmer, who has spent decades working to bring better health care to the world's poor, primarily in Haiti. Shadowing the doctor on his rounds, Kidder paints a portrait of a person we can't help but want to emulate. In the process, he educates readers about the current and historical political realities that connect our countries and brings to light the ripple effects of some of the greatest wealth disparities on the planet. This portrait makes it impossible to put the book down without a new resolve to better understand global labor/management dynamics and do our part in raising awareness and reducing the structural violence of the status quo.

Following the horrific earthquake in Haiti, I was compelled to know Haiti from Paul Farmer's perspective. Farmer's *The Uses of Haiti* is not for the fainthearted, as it goes about describing the brutal colonization of Haiti, the extraction of its wealth as the first European settlement in the New World and the subsequent impoverishment and ravaging of its land and people. Both Jonathan Kozol and Noam Chomsky in the book's Preface and Introduction express fears that Haiti's much neglected and shameful history, despite the impressive efforts of a number of writers, "is fated for oblivion" (Chomsky) or "consigned to the critical oblivion that is reserved for books that threaten the accepted lies by which we live" (Kozol). These may be accurate assessments, as Haiti fades from the radar screen of mainstream reporting, experiencing a seismic shift of political

awareness and narrative following that of the earth.

These two works prick our conscience and shine a light on how creative, deep or shallow are our own resilience and solidarity with those, near and far, whose labors might otherwise be invisible to us in our relative privilege. In Farmer's update to the current edition, there's a more thorough treatment of U.S. interference in Haiti's affairs that helps explain what Haitians have long known: that the road to liberation looks very much like "mountains beyond mountains" to those actually living beyond the sound-bites, living their multidimensional lives 'on the ground.' On the ground is where what heals and wounds is too complex for a colonizing sort of mind to appreciate, but easy enough for a human heart to break open and acknowledge.

(Continued from page 3)

in this life.

During my time in El Salvador, I saw Romero's compassion and grace in the eyes of Jonathan, Rogelio and Angélica, among many others.

Jonathan went to the mountains at the age of 12 to join the guerillas after his brother was disappeared. He shared how, after the Peace Accords, he worked with all those who disarmed, FMLN and military, to obtain training and access to services. When I asked him if it was hard to work with former rank and file military men, he said it was at first, but then he realized they were poor like him and in the same situation. (However, the former military were given prime land and easier access to credit than former FMLN).

Rogelio was nine years old when his entire community

was massacred. We sat at the site of his former community as Rogelio described the horrors he experienced when the Atlatl brigade, trained at the School of the Americas, killed 150 people including all his immediate family in front of his eyes. His humble expression of the atrocities was beyond words. Our time at the site ended by holding hands in a circle and praying for peace.

Angélica, our host in Papaturro, told why she and her community had to flee to refugee camps in Honduras. She told of the fear they lived in... how a military soldier chased her when she was eight months pregnant, how that same soldier later came to her house and demanded to know if she was feeding the guerrillas. "Yes, I feed the guerrillas," she responded, and continuing said, "and I feed the soldiers too. God said feed the hungry, cloth the

naked, house the homeless. He did not say kill and slaughter your neighbor."

Commemorating Romero's assassination, and more importantly his life, is not just to remember the terrible injustices in El Salvador or the role the U.S. played, but to hold Romero's spirit as we work to change the current policies, beliefs and institutions that restrain countries like El Salvador at levels of inequality similar to pre-war numbers.

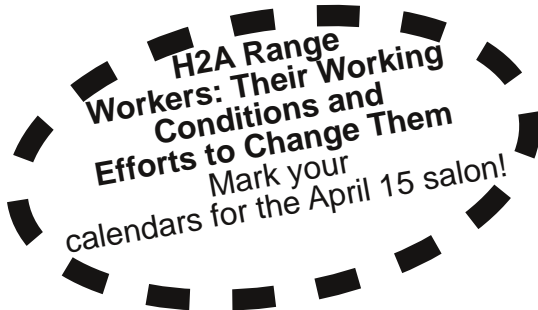
Part of what draws me to DJPC is that our solidarity work is based in the understanding that economic injustice is at the root of most violence in our world today and that peace is not the absence of war, but rather is rooted in economic justice and the full respect of all people's human rights. I am proud to be part of an organization that perpetuates Monseñor Romero's spirit.

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**"Working in Solidarity with
the people of Latin America"**



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