

Mickey Davis traveled to El Salvador with the Heartland delegation earlier this summer. Here are a few of his reflections, in daily diary format.

Tuesday

- 6:30 a.m. – Gathered for breakfast at the guest house and met the other occupants of the house. Most of the other people were from FOMUNDO, a Spain-based N.G.O. that facilitates economic development projects. We also met a woman from Denmark's equivalent to the Peace Corps.
- 8:00 a.m. – Traveled to Sonsonate to meet with Alvaro, a Salvadoran who works with Seeds of Learning, a California-based N.G.O. that is in charge of building the school Heartland is funding in El Tablon Cerna. We discussed needed materials and money for our school.
- 9:30 a.m. – Visited the cancer hospital and church where **Archbishop Oscar Romero** lived and was killed. It is a routine stop for delegations in San Salvador, but still just as painful no matter how many times we go. We were shown pictures of Romero being shot and the altar exactly where he had been killed. As he was holding up the Bible, he was shot in the chest right in front of the cross in the center of the church. On the cross, a **bleeding** Jesus looks on, witnessing the death of another martyr following in his footsteps.

Wednesday

- 8:00 p.m. – Reflections. We spoke about the tower of Babel, how it was humans' way of trying to be as powerful as God by reaching up to the Heavens. This sparked a very theological discussion, which took place on a covered deck in the pouring rain. Knowing that the pastoral team does not go to bed until we do (and that they get up at 4 in the morning to prepare for the day), we decided to finish the conversation the next day because it was already 9:30 p.m.

Thursday

- 8:00 a.m. – Departed for the 3 marginalized schools in Berlin. These schools were built after the earthquake in 2001. Severely underfunded by the federal government, these schools rely heavily on local government, N.G.O.s, and generous community parents who volunteer their time and effort to shape these schools into constructive learning environments. Each

school had a different atmosphere – the first was crazily excited by a visit from “Gringos”, and some high-intensity **pato pato ganzo (duck duck goose)** followed suit. The second school greeted us in English, which was a surprise. One of the student’s cousins was visiting from Texas, and she was teaching everyone (teacher included) basic English. It was remarkable because she was only 11 years old. The third school invited us to play soccer. After a furious half hour game in which Mickey got humiliated by a team of preteens, it was time to leave.

Today was also special because it was the first day that Mily was our translator. Milly was a girl that came to Iowa 8 years ago for surgery on her legs. Her mom, Heidi, makes the best papusas ever,.

10:00 a.m. – Met with the teachers and the directiva of the school in Centro, where Heartland is funding the two 7-9th grade teachers. We discussed the progress (or lack thereof) of the negotiations with the Ministry of Education as to when they will take over the salaries of these teachers so Heartland can afford to pay for teachers for the new school in Cerna. **Douglas**, an amazing individual who not only teaches three classes but also acts as the principal of the school, delighted in telling us all of the work that other N.G.O.s have been doing with the school. REDES, another Spain-based N.G.O., is building two brick classrooms to replace the provisional structures currently being used. Due to the temperature and air circulation of a concrete building as opposed to a crudely-made wood building, we could see why the teachers were so excited about this news.

11:00 a.m. – Walked up the hill to Centro to meet with the Directiva. Only a few members could make the meeting because it was during the day and was somewhat impromptu, but it went well nonetheless. The Heartland buildings are not being used for electricity with the solar panels, but they are still put to good use for meetings and other community gatherings when the weather is poor. The theme of the meeting seemed to be that Heartland will still continue to keep Centro in our thoughts as we shift towards mainly helping Cerna.

1:00 p.m. – After lunch, met with **directiva** of El Tablon Cerna.

Since they lack a community center, we met outside of one of the larger houses under the shade of a large tarp. The directiva was very excited to see us and show us all of the improvements that they had accomplished with the help of N.G.O.s since the last time we made a visit. In just one year, the community had been able to work with REDES to build concrete houses for families in the community who legally own their land. Many new and old houses had been fitted with new stoves

The words and experienced by Mickey and the other members of this summer's delegation sound familiar to those who have been to Berlin with a Heartland delegation in the past; while the names and faces of the people and towns may remain constant, each voyager's journey is a different experience, and we celebrate with each returning traveler and look forward to their stories.