

International Mission Committee
El Salvador Update- November 2008
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Something was calling me and I just "needed to make a trip to El Salvador". It might have been the early cold weather I 'm not quite sure. This trip proved to be one of the most productive and exciting trips I have ever made. I would like to share some of the highlights with you as none of this would be possible without the wonderful support each of you provides to our International Mission in El Salvador.

1. This year, IMC started to focus on Economic Development in the canton. The July delegation discussed this desire with Fr. Dean Brackley of the University of Central America. The IMC and Dean set up a meeting for me with the head of the Business School at the UCA for this trip. The result --The UCA has agreed to begin a study and to execute an economic development project for El Tablon Cerna with a first meeting this Feb. and a potential start of the study by April of 2009. This could lead to the creation of jobs for the families in Cerna by 2010 or 2011.
2. Andres, a college student studying English who receives a scholarship from Heartland, assisted with the translation duties for the last medical delegation and has completed his first 2 years of college with excellent grades. His English has dramatically improved since my last visit and I think he will be a role model for what can happen when the right student is given the opportunity to continue his or her education.
3. I was given the opportunity to participate in the graduation of the 7th 8th and 9th graders in El Tablon Centro. Beginning January 2009, there will be over 25 students in 7th grade, over 25 students in 8th grade and 8 students in 9th grade. Three to five of the 9th grade graduates from El Tablon Centro will be applying for high school scholarships. Just a short time ago there were only 2 classrooms and a school that went to 4th grade !
4. The school project in Cerna for grades K thru 3 is on schedule and will be completed by Christmas 2008 in time for school to start mid January 2009. It would appear that we will have about 30 children who will be starting school next month. I was very pleased with the work that Roberto, the head engineer, was doing. They have added additional rebar to minimize any impact a tremor might have on the structure, they plan to tile the floor and to paint the entire building. The view from the classroom is beautiful.
5. The directiva in Cerna will be putting together a plan for Heartland's Feb 2009 delegation for the potential development of a co-op that will buy and store grain. They would use the profits for community projects and community needs. In addition, IMC will be evaluating the possibility of providing Micro Credit for fertilizer for the 2009/2010 season. Providing Micro Credit is one of the programs the IMC believes will assist in the development of an improved standard of living.

As I reflected on this trip I realized that it was just two short years ago when Cerna asked us for our help with a dream of theirs to build a school. At that time they were not a legalized canton and only four people could read or write. Today they are a legalized canton, have six acres of community ground, a K-3 school will be completed, they are looking at developing cooperatives and the UCA will begin an economic development study with the potential for the creation of new jobs for the canton. All this in just two year's time!

The highlight of the trip for me was to hear Juan, the president of the directiva in Cerna, say that they are so happy that Heartland "made" them learn to read and write. Because today they can go to San Miguel or San Salvador and they are not afraid.