

El Salvador: Delegation Trip Report



Delegation Dates:

*Friday, February 20 –
Friday, February 27*

Delegates:

- Mark Davis
- Scott Valentine
- Trisha Vander Wilt
- Joyce Hoffman
- Mike Bassett
- Lisa Kilian
- Matt Kilian
- Luke Davis
- Megan Kreigler

Walking in Solidarity

Heartland Presbyterian Church's International Mission committee has been involved in building relationships with rural communities and helping the extremely poor in El Salvador for over 10 years. The Heartland International Mission committee is passionately committed to walking with the people of these communities and enabling them to sustainably improve their lives. We do this through a combination of planning, partnerships, communication

and encountering the hardships of life together, face-to-face.

We would like to share this journey with you. We have encountered and walked side-by-side with the amazing people of El Salvador. We have heard their stories, shared their hardships and have become friends. Our journey together with the people of El Salvador is an enduring labor of love for all of us involved in this extraordinary relationship.

*"The soul grows by
its constant
participation in that
which transcends it."*

Delegation Agenda

FRIDAY: Travel day – Kathy Mahler picked us up – Spend the night in San Salvador

SATURDAY: Visit – Divina Providencia – University of Central America – Museum of the Word – Memorial Wall

SUNDAY: Mass at cathedral – Market day – Walk to the cross

MONDAY: Visit – Massacre site at El Mozote – Museum at Perquin

TUESDAY: Trip to El Tablon Centro – Meeting with Education leaders and Community – UCA and El Tablon Cerna – Preparation for Celebration – Spend the night in canton

WEDNESDAY: Dedication of the school – Celebration with the communities

THURSDAY: Visit – Marginalized schools – El Recreo church and museum

FRIDAY: Travel home



Child at the dedication who will be attending the new school in El Tablon Cerna

Water Project Committee Meeting

Heartland is focused on gaining accurate knowledge of the overall water situation in and around Berlin especially as it impacts the surrounding cantons.

This delegation started to gather information by meeting with the Berlin Water Project Committee to understand their hardships, process, and vision for water in the cantons.

With this information, Heartland can hear the stories of El Tablon and their concerns.

We need to support the committee by understanding the barriers in the current system, the big picture and identifying opportunities and partners that will help improve availability and sustainability of clean water in the cantons.



Mark (Heartland), Mercedes (water committee), Chepe Morales (water committee), Blanca (Pastoral Team), Lucio (president of water committee), Scott (Heartland)

El Tablon Centro Education Meeting

Heartland supports the education of the children in El Tablon Centro. The delegation has a meeting planned each trip to demonstrate our support of education, continue to build the relationship with the school leaders and teachers, understand the status of the children, and the community's support of the school.

Each trip, the delegation gathers information such as the number of students enrolled in school and the number of students in attendance for each grade level. The delegation on this trip worked with the "school board" leaders to clearly understand the barriers to the Ministry of Education picking up the continued funding for the 7,8,9th grade teachers that Heartland has been funding for 4+ years.

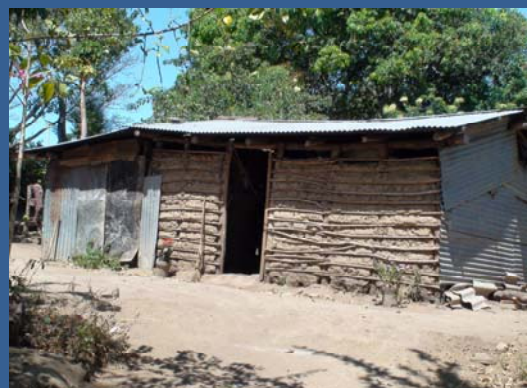
We now understand the next steps of the project with Intervida (a non-governmental organization) that plans to help meet the requirements for the Ministry of Education to support and provide salaries for the 7,8,9 grade teachers.

El Tablon Centro Community Meeting

Heartland continues to cultivate our relationship with the community of El Tablon Centro. This meeting is set up to continue building our relationship with the Community Directiva and show our continued support. The delegation will plan to gain a better understanding of the Directiva's accomplishments, hardships, current projects, and concerns in their community. This will allow Heartland to grow our relationship with the community and identify potential future opportunities to support them with community development projects.

The main topic the community wanted to discuss with us was the replacement of the solar panels in the community center. This was a project Bob Cook, former mission co-worker, helped Heartland coordinate with the community. Another option instead of replacing the solar panels is electricity. There is a possibility that the community will have access to electricity in the next year. The question remaining then is how the community would pay for the monthly expenses.

Our committee is currently working with the Pastoral Team and El Tablon Centro on a solution to help the community in this situation. We will be looking at the community's priorities and goals for the next 5 years for us to decide how we want to support them in a way they will become self-sustainable and do not always depend on Heartland so we can sponsor other projects in the community.



El Tablon and University of Central America Partnership

The University of Central America (UCA) has made a four year commitment to work with Heartland's sister-communities, El Tablon Centro and El Tablon Cerna.

During the first phase, the UCA will research the geography of the cantons as well as meet with the community members to find out their demographics, interests and skills. Then, the students will analyze the information gathered and in coordination with the communities decide on projects that facilitate economic and social development of the residents.

After the projects are identified, the UCA will provide literacy and technical training to those residents who will be working on the projects. The UCA will ensure the residents are confident in their roles of the project before they hand over the responsibilities completely to the community.

Heartland International Mission is thrilled about this

opportunity for both the community and the UCA. The resources the UCA can provide far outweigh what the committee can do for the residents. The Pastoral Team and mission co-worker will be involved to keep Heartland informed of the progress throughout the project.



Fernando (UCA), Eddie (Heartland), Scott (Heartland), Ricardo (UCA), Daniel Andrade (Cerna), Ismael Gonzalez (Cerna), Juan (Cerna)

El Tablon Cerna School Dedication

Three years ago, Heartland's relationship grew in El Salvador when the Pastoral Team asked if Heartland would be willing to meet with another community requesting support. It was a no-brainer for Heartland to say yes since it was a smaller community connected to the current sister partnership. The community's highest priority was education for their children. The delegation took this

request back to the committee to discuss further. It didn't take long for the committee to approve and move forward.

The committee began planning with the Pastoral Team how this dream would become a reality. As the project began, Heartland received two memorial funds that would pay for the majority of the costs for the school. Ruby Hartsook, Larry's mother, left behind estate money that was given freely on behalf of the children of El Tablon Cerna and Trina Fischer, Bill's daughter, made it clear that whatever memorial gifts might be given on her behalf, she wanted put toward the school that the children of El Tablon Cerna needed.

During this trip, the delegation prepared a celebration for the opening and dedication of the school. Other members, friends, and family of Heartland joined the delegation for this special occasion. With the help and coordination of Pastoral Team, everyone assisted in preparing the meal for the residents of Cerna and the surrounding communities and decorated the school with balloons, streamers and prayer flags.

Community members spoke during the dedication to give thanks for the hard work and support by everyone involved in the project. The family members of the memorials also took a moment to recognize their loved ones. It was a great accomplishment for the community and Heartland to share this moment together.

Trina Fischer and Ruby Hartsook were present during the school dedication - they were remembered, loved, and mystically laughing with us as we danced, crying with us as we cried, and hoping with us as we put our hope in God's steadfast love that endures forever.



School building in El Tablon Cerna



A special message from our delegation



Joyce Hoffman: Why did you choose to go on the delegation to El Salvador? It had been 10 years since I went to El Salvador, so I was very anxious to see the progress that had been made and to renew old friendships. **What was your most meaningful moment on the trip?** There were so many moments, but one that really sticks out in my mind is the day the school was dedicated. One of the fathers stood up with his young son and said, "Now my child can go to school". He was so grateful for the education that was now made available to their children. **What was the most important thing you learned personally on this trip?** I am trying to slow down my pace so that I actually look at people and see them. All have a story to tell. I do hope that my eyes are open to see and my ears will hear. **What was your biggest misconception?** That came after my first visit. They gave to me more than I could ever give to them. Listening to their story and walking with them is the greatest thing that we can do. We learned so much from their hospitality, the faith that they have and the kind gentle spirit that they offer. **What is one thing you feel you can do to help?** I will try to encourage people to become involved in the Heartland El Salvador Mission. I will be available to spread the word in any way that I can.



Mark Davis: Why did you choose to go on the delegation to El Salvador? I try to accompany as many as I can and had special incentive this time because my son Luke was going for the very first time. **What was your most meaningful moment on the trip?** Seeing Maria Elena for the first time after not seeing her for a couple of years; Hearing Milagro Rodriguez talk about changes that the Pastoral Team have undergone over the years; Celebrating the School with the Fischers, Hartsooks, and the people of El Tablon Cerna. **What was the most important thing you learned personally on this trip?** How Trisha Vander Wilt is growing in her leadership role with the delegation. How ongoing costs of water and electricity cause more fear among the people of El Tablon than the much larger one-time costs. I think it speak of our need to cultivate faith in our long-term commitment to them. **What was your biggest misconception?** Perhaps my assumption that the school building and the extraordinary work of the communities would convince the Ministry of Education to offer support more willingly. **What is one thing you feel you can do to help?** My role is in my mind- to accompany our delegations and to enable them to gain the full experience of our relationship, both during the trip and afterward.



Mike Bassett: Why did you choose to go on the delegation to El Salvador? My first trip to Berlin was just last June, with the delegation from my church (Central Pres.). During that trip I developed a strong attachment to the country, the Salvadoran people and the work of the Pastoral House. I didn't want to leave and knew I had to go back. And being able to go back with the Heartland delegation was a real treat. It was wonderful to go from the first-timer's experience to seeing the strong relationships, level of involvement and successes of the most experienced and involved church-canton partnership. **What was your most meaningful moment on the trip?** Being a part of the preparations and celebration of the new school in El Tablon Cerna. It was really fun to help prepare for the celebrations, and I loved the experience of staying overnight in a canton. But what touched me the most was seeing the deep, emotional satisfaction displayed by the members of the Heartland delegation and the Heartland donor families. It was evident that a lot of long, hard work went into making the school happen and that finally witnessing the fruition of all that work gave them a tremendous feeling of accomplishment and joy. Progress really can be made. **What was the most important thing you learned personally on this trip?** That I have to go back. **What was your biggest misconception?** I can't really think of any significant misconceptions. I had been to third world countries before my first trip, last June. And I went on that trip with an open mind and learned a lot. Then I did a lot of homework between trips. So I feel like I have a pretty good handle on the realities of El Salvador. And I didn't find anything on this trip to contradict that. **What is one thing you feel you can do to help?** Go back. Stay involved. Get more people involved.



Matt Kilian: Why did you choose to go on the delegation to El Salvador? I have been hearing all the stories growing up about it and I wanted to see if for myself. **What was your most meaningful moment on the trip?** It was definitely playing soccer with all of the kids. It was cool that people can play a sport without knowing what the other person is saying. **What was the most important thing you learned personally on this trip?** How much I actually have. First of all the house that I live in is humongous. My room is as big as houses down there. **What was your biggest misconception?** The fact that they are so happy the way that they are. Every day is the same thing but they love to love their life. **What is the one thing you feel you can do to help?** Definitely be less wasteful and more appreciative of what I have.



Trisha Vander Wilt: Why did you choose to go on the delegation to El Salvador? I chose to go on this delegation for the school dedication. It was a dream of the community to have a school nearby where their children could attend and I know the hard work and dedication that was involved by so many individuals that I wanted to be there to see the smiles and joy of the people in El Tablon Cerna. It is also important for me to continue to build my relationship with the Pastoral Team and understand the work they do for our committee at Heartland. **What was the most meaningful moment on this trip?** Many moments, but one would be the church service in Berlin. It reminded me that worship is not always about the words that are being spoken or sung but about the presence of God within me and how important it is for me to have a community to share in the experience. **What was the most important thing you learned personally on this trip?** I learned that I may never experience the pain and sufferings that the people in El Salvador have struggled through, but I can listen to their stories and build a relationship with them by their knowledge and experience they have lived. **What was your biggest misconception?** There are not resources to help the poor communities - there are many resources even in El Salvador, but the difficult part of getting the resource is the connection of the groups, where to begin and how to communicate the needs and bring the resources together. **What is one thing you feel you can do to help?** I will continue to pray for our brothers and sisters in El Salvador, share my story, and encourage others to get involved in this unique relationship our church has with the Pastoral Team and El Tablon communities.



Lisa Kilian: Why did you choose to go on the delegation to El Salvador? I have been curious about our church international mission project, but thought that I would not go for several years, until we were "empty nesters" in 5 years. When Matt, our 17 year old son expressed an interest and we began planning for his trip, I felt directed by my faith and my soul to go, too. It was a wonderful mom-son experience and I'd recommend it to all. **What was your most meaningful moment on the trip?** There were many. To pick one, I believe it was connecting with 3 of our other delegates and a young mother, older father, and toddler child in their home in El Tablon Cerna. We were guests spending the night in their home, but I felt right and felt like I was at home. I guess that is the true spirit of hospitality, being made to feel like you are at home, in someone else's home. The language barrier was no barrier at all. That evening in the dark, we witnessed right outside their door, above us, the milky-way and all of its beauty. I felt close to God, close to my Heartland family, close to Matt, and close to the family hosting us. I began to understand, or partially understand the meanings behind our mission efforts. It was peaceful, quiet, reflective, and fun. Toddlers and children's smiles make all things fun. The pride in her father's and mother's eyes is deep in my heart. I want her to grow up, with education, with love for her community, with pride in herself, and with knowing God's presence. **What was the most important thing you learned personally on this trip?** That Heartland church's efforts are far reaching, and deep, and true in a remote area of the world, and that as a small part of that mission, at that place for a short week, I can move quickly from guest to feeling like El Salvador and her people are home. This is an extension of God's work. I also learned more about myself, as a mom, as a Heartland member, and as a child of God. **What was your biggest misconception?** That Heartland was the only church and group doing something with the Casa Pastoral house efforts. I knew other delegations from St. Boniface (that's the only one I could previously name) and Bob Cook's efforts and the Presbytery efforts were in El Salvador, and I of course participate in the Don Justo Coffee and Blanca's bags, but I had no idea, or had not paid attention that 11 or more groups from Iowa were working in El Salvador with the women of the pastoral house casa. I really didn't know about what Companero's is or does until I began looking at Kathy's blog late in 2008 and reading about the delegation that went in January from another church. I still don't fully understand that. As a Heartland church member, it was previously overwhelming to learn about it all from afar...by that I mean, it was not personal, even having seen Bill Fisher and many other church members, friends, go down. Until I was touched and began to want to seek more information, more connections, did I feel a conscious connection. On the other hand, I do believe deeply that I have always had a subconscious connection to El Salvador and Heartland's mission efforts through prayers, others stories, pictures throughout our church building, and votes to continue those efforts. So, while I fully supported the mission efforts and truly was engaged by the stories our previous delegations have shared, I couldn't or didn't grasp until being personally touched. **What is one thing you feel you can do to help?** I am still contemplating this. Certainly the worship service which we will take part in will be one thing I can do. Help spread the word. Also, listen more closely now that I am here. There is so much knowledge and study and love that has gone in the experiences of previous delegations. I have also talked with several moms and dads from our church about the experience of going with Matt, and am hopeful that our Youth group participants listened to Luke and Matt and are inspired to participate. I will seek out more information about the work of Companero's, the coffee and water projects, and other needs of our friends of El Tablon. I will support and help foster my kids' interests in international awareness, cultural understanding, acceptance of diversity, love, helping others, reaching deeper into their hearts, giving from their personal blessings and gifts. Hmm, I know there is much more I can do.



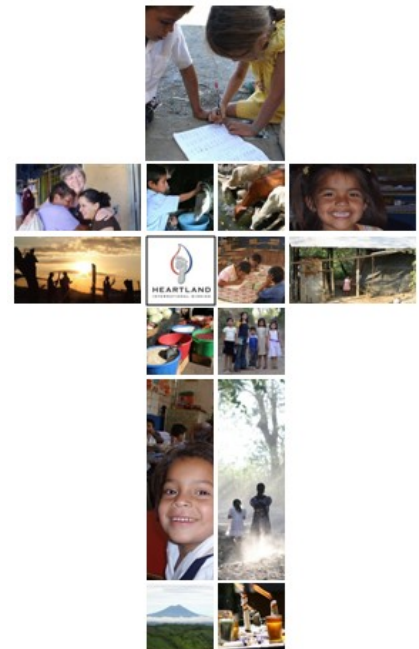
Megan Kreigler: Why did you choose to go on the delegation to El Salvador? Previous mission work, especially in New Orleans, was so incredibly satisfying and eye-opening that I was eager to join the delegation. God was pulling me to a new place, where I would grow while doing His work - in ways I may never comprehend. **What was your most meaningful moment on the trip?** Snapshots - I breathed in the warm air as we drove through the night, content that I was where I should be. The names of the dead and disappeared stretched too far. **What was the most important thing you learned personally on this trip?** By our departure I knew I left one family for another. We speak different languages, have been raised in different cultures, and come from different histories - but as children of God we are companions. **What was your biggest misconception?** My biggest misconception may have been regarding the nature of mission work. In New Orleans, my hands gutted houses. In El Salvador, the need was for my voice. Un voz to inform about its bloody history. Un voz to decry how the struggle continues for basic social and economic justice. Un voz to jolt others out of complacency. Un voz to inspire change. **What is one thing you feel you can do to help?** Continue my journey with the people of El Salvador and see where He leads me.



Luke Davis: Why did you choose to go on the delegation to El Salvador? I've heard about it since I was little and I always wanted to go. **What was your most meaningful moment on the trip?** Most likely when I first started interacting with the kids from El Tablon, and when we played tag for the first time. **What was the most important thing you learned personally on this trip?** I don't know, I grew alot socially, with people on the delegation and people I was meeting for the first time. I learned alot in the meetings about the problems going on and how we can help fix them. **What was your biggest misconception?** I think it would have to be what San Salvador was like, because I expected it to be worse off but it was pretty nice from what I could see and just kind of crowded. **What is the one thing you feel you can do to help?** I defiantly want to go again, but until then I want to get more involved with the work going on at our church for El Salvador. I also want to try to get teens from the Youth to consider going as soon as they can.



Scott Valentine: Why did you choose to go on the delegation to El Salvador? I choose to go as often as I can to help provide continuity to the mission and the relationship. I also go to support the youth that want to travel with the Heartland delegation. **What was your most meaningful moment on the trip?** Talking with one of the high school students about staying in school and her decision to do so because of Heartlands support for her. **What was the most important thing you learned personally on this trip?** That relationships take a long time to develop and that it is hard to allow people to truly know you, and to be open to the pain of a loving friendship. **What is the one thing you feel you can do to help?** Continue to support Heartland's walk with the people of ES and help to provide leadership to the trips and support to the IMC.



How you can help

Financial Donations

Every mission is only successful as the financial capabilities supporting it. Our hearts at Heartland are with our brothers and sisters in El Salvador as we walk in solidarity with them. To help them create sustainable change and further their personal and community self development giving resources is vital to their success.

Giving Your Talents

Heartland International Mission is always looking for talented individuals who can give of their time. We need committee

members who are talented at organization, management, communication, fundraising, event planning, marketing, and creating marketing messages, research and congregation communication. These talents of individuals greatly increase our effectiveness in helping support the self development of the El Salvadoran people. If you are interested in learning more or joining the committee, please contact Eddie Ellis elliseddie@mchsi.com (515) 554-4727 or Trisha Vander Wilt trishavw@gmail.com (515) 250-7668.

Heartland International Mission Committee Members:

- Chair: Eddie Ellis
- Sec: Trisha Vander Wilt
- Session Liaison: Matt Killian
- Bill Fischer
- Scott Valentine
- Mark Davis
- Robert Finney