



# Annual Report 2016







# Sister Parish Inc. Iglesias Hermanas

[www.sisterparish.org](http://www.sisterparish.org)



*"You have shared with us your tortilla. The tortilla comes from your corn, your water, your air. The tortilla is a part of you. And so I will always carry a part of you with me.." – Bruce*

## Our Mission

Sister Parish exists to foster mutual understanding and commitment to peace and justice among people in the United States and Central America. This objective is pursued through intentional linking between churches and Christian communities in the United States and in Central America. Delegation travel to the North and South with home stays is an essential aspect in enhancing awareness and understanding, and in nurturing closer relationships.

## Our Vision

We believe the Kingdom of God is already present but not complete, and the liberating Gospel calls us to work together to build this Kingdom through: consciousness-raising, solidarity, reconciliation, and ecumenism.

## Sister Parish Staff

**Brian Alejandro Tyler**

**Carrie Stengel**

**David Ericson**

**N. Julieta Borja**

# Letter from Executive Director

## Carrie Stengel



***“The grave danger is to disown our neighbors. When we do so, we deny their humanity and our own humanity without realizing it; we deny ourselves, and we deny the most important Commandments of Jesus. That is dehumanization. But there is an opportunity here: that the light of our love for our neighbor can illuminate the Earth with its stunning brightness, like lightning in the dark, that this will wake us and true humanity will emerge with strong, stubborn, authentic resistance.”***

***- Pope Francis***

The board and staff chose the theme of Year of Encounter for 2016 and it is hard to think of a more fitting theme for our organization. Our mission is based on facilitating encounters that transform people in ways we hope will transform communities. Through ties of friendship and community, we seek to make the lightning in the dark ever brighter, ever stronger.

In 2016, the Sister Parish network organized and facilitated 8 delegations with 51 participating delegates. We were pleased to co-organize two non-linkage delegations this year as well: one with faculty and students from the Pacific School of Religion in California and

the other with members of our Board of Directors and friends who participated in a Southern Encounter gathering.

Between delegations, staff kept busy facilitating communication, sending videos, calling on Skype, and exchanging prayer requests. We carried out 56 community visits in El Salvador and Guatemala and supported communities with their local projects, including 104 scholarships, a Vacation Bible School serving 70 students, a typing school serving 50 students, and a women’s project that provides services from aerobics classes to crafts workshops.

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***“Our country is a great country, but we don’t always hear about other realities and the effects of our country in other places. You share a reality with us, a truth, so that we can go home and speak truth to power.” - Bill***

# Letter from Executive Director *continued*

## Carrie Stengel

When I think about the meaning of our work, I hold on to moments that strike me like lightning, the good-byes with host families, the laughter that requires no translation, the song that moved me to tears, the meeting that inspired me to fight for gender justice or migrant rights. I remember a beautiful afternoon at Laguna Lachúa with over 60 people, many of whom had stayed up all night to prepare the tamales for our picnic lunch. And I reflect on the connections between survivors, north and south, sharing perspectives on justice and forgiveness – and how they reach toward healing.

As a community, we encourage reflection and growth. This is true in moments of difficulty, as well as success. We faced multiple challenges with the visa processes for our South to North delegations last year, but we are grateful for the perseverance that ensured successful delegations. We also thank our network for seeing an opportunity to educate people in the U.S. churches about privilege and immigration

processes faced by Central Americans.

Sometimes we hear that people are cautious of the Sister Parish model, because it is easier to write a check than to engage in right relationship. A process of relationship takes time, trust, patience, and heart. It requires a different kind of giving, a giving of the self. A few years ago, one Sister Parish delegation was reflecting on the meaning of solidarity – a concept that can be difficult to talk about. One young man from an urban Guatemalan community had a simple answer: solidarity is giving someone half of what you have instead of just giving your leftovers.

There is a lot of talk about these times. What is each of us called to do? What is at stake? What can we do to protect what we care about? At the very least we can say our eyes and ears are open. We can say, I will not turn away. I will strive to love rather than disown my neighbor in the hopes that that lightning in the dark, the combined forces of all who choose this path, will indeed illuminate us.

- Carrie Stengel

*“We are going to support each other spiritually, through God. We say prayers for you in our language and we don’t speak the same language. But for God, language doesn’t matter. We are all children of God.” Tomas*





# Letter from Board President

**Nancy Wiens**

*"Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There's a crack,  
a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in."*

*- From the song "Anthem",  
By Leonard Cohen*

I was in Guatemala on the Open Delegation this November when I learned that the prolific, influential songwriter Leonard Cohen



had died. Saddened, our group gathered around an iPad and played a spontaneous "top hits" remembrance concert.

Hearing the verse "ring the bells" brought memories of the most recent South to North delegation visit from Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Tierra Nueva II, Guatemala to my church, St. Joan of Arc Catholic Community in Minneapolis, MN. During the delegates' stay, we experienced many joys but also witnessed the "cracks" in U.S. society -- we fed the poor, spoke with women struggling for reconciliation and forgiveness after suffering tragedy, and worshipped with American Indians

who have been marginalized. We escaped the Twin Cities in mid-week for a comforting (albeit rainy) retreat at a central -Minnesota cabin. On the way home, we stopped at a tiny rural chapel to say a final prayer. Someone rang the chapel bells and the clear, resolute tone soothed our spirits and buoyed us up.

In retrospect, the ringing of those chapel bells was a symbol of how we had witnessed imperfection and difficulty but had joined together to learn, to grow, to share and spread the lessons and the love we had gathered. As they prepared to return home, the delegates said: "What we have experienced during this delegation strengthens us, through the sharing of faith and our social and cultural lives. Faith and the hope that we can change the world unite us – a more humane world is possible."

*Continued on following page.*

## US Board of Directors

Nancy Wiens  
Tom Pouliot  
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Aury Lemus  
Pedro Tiul  
Clementina González  
Eusebio Chamán Caal

# Letter from Board President *continued*

**Nancy Wiens**

And so it goes with Sister Parish. Working together with respect, kindness and solidarity, we ring what bells we have. Even though we face difficulties, we channel our spirit, faith and energy to find a way to let in the light. And the love.

We were honored to hold our April 2016 board meeting at Faith Lutheran Church in West Fargo, ND. We were warmly welcomed and, when the 'business' part of the meeting was done, we took part in community worship, fellowship and the annual Fiesta / Silent Auction. A lasting memory from that weekend is the image of dozens of home-made quilts (destined for a charitable cause) draped over the backs of every pew in the church during Sunday services.

Our November meeting started with a teleconference in the U.S. but ended in Guatemala and El Salvador during the Open Delegation. Board members joined several other delegates



to participate in the Southern Encounter and strengthen relationships with our Southern sisters and brothers. A consistent thread running through this delegation was how people came together to form what I lovingly call “pop-up” communities — generous, kind and loving folks who surrounded us from day one and who shared their lives and their stories with us wherever we went. I feel blessed to have experienced these loving encounters.

*Together, let us ring the bells* — I'd like to extend an invitation to actively join the Sister Parish community. If there is not a Sister Parish relationship at your church, consider starting one. Also consider joining our Board of Directors to help sustain Sister Parish in its work of uniting communities across borders. Please email [usoffice@sisterparish.org](mailto:usoffice@sisterparish.org) for more information.

- Nancy Wiens





# Financial Report 2016

Note:

*This report does not reflect the generous in-kind donations from our all-volunteer board and other individuals, or Sister Parish assets and liabilities.*

## Income

Donations	\$ 39,778
Projects	\$ 38,544
Delegations	\$ 64,380
Events	\$ 603
Member Fees	\$ 13,416
Grants	\$ 6,923
Other	\$ 852

**Total**                    **\$ 164,496**

## Expense

Delegations	\$ 39,866
Projects	\$ 38,544
Personnel	\$ 51,445
Assemblies	\$ 3,173
Facilities	\$ 1,786
Administrative	\$ 1,535
Operations	\$ 5,903
Publications/Mail	\$ 948
Miscellaneous	\$ 40

**Total**                    **\$ 143,240**

*“Borders are lines that do not exist and are created to separate us. ... I am forever grateful for meeting people that bring new ideas to my life.”*

*- Otto*





# 2016 Sister Parish, Inc. Donors

## Heroes

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# 2016 Sister Parish, Inc. Donors



## **Friends *continued***

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*Thank you to all who donated time, energy, and  
in-kind gifts to the Sister Parish mission.*

*We thank all of our supporters for their  
generous, unique gifts to Sister Parish, Inc.*

*Special thanks to Gary Larson for the accounting.*



## Friends *continued*

Judith Besch

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*“It was my first time out of  
the country and it was  
absolutely life-changing. The  
sights we saw were breath-  
taking, but more importantly  
the people were all so loving.*

*When we arrived in Las  
Margaritas II, I immediately  
felt as if I was meant to be  
there.” – Drew*



*We apologize for errors or omissions. Please contact us with  
any corrections or suggestions you might have.*



## Sister Parish Communities

**Christ Episcopal Church  
San Andrés Itzapa Episcopal Community**

**Danville Congregational Church  
San Antonio Catholic Church**

**Faith Lutheran Church  
San Marcos Evangelista, Tierra Nueva I**

**First Lutheran Church of Duluth  
San Antonio Los Ranchos**

**Trinity Episcopal Church  
San José la Montaña**

**First United Methodist Church of Decorah  
Potrerillos**



**First United Methodist Church of Downers Grove  
UPAVIM**

**St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church  
Las Margaritas II**

**St. Joan of Arc Catholic Community  
Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, Tierra Nueva II**

**St. Thomas Lutheran Church  
Santo Domingo de Guzmán, Chichipate**

**Wallingford United Methodist Church  
Guarjila**

**People of Hope  
ACOMUJERZA**

*Thank you to all of  
our members and  
supporters.  
Together, we are  
building bridges of  
light and love.*

