

# SISTER PARISH

IGLESIAS HERMANAS

## Still together no matter what!

2021 and 2022 have been active years for Sister Parish. Although travel has not been possible, the Sister Parish community has had wonderful ideas to keep sharing our cultures and struggles for justice. Since the pandemic hit, we have been honored to work on virtual events, retreats, and delegations, as well as emergency relief.

St. Joan of Arc and Tierra Nueva 2 organized a virtual delegation in August 2022, with a series of video calls prioritizing small group time for games, as well as serious discussions about the social justice issues in each community. In December 2021, Wallingford UMC and Guarjila had a weekend virtual retreat, sharing cooking videos, music, and reflections. Los Ranchos and Duluth prepared an event for the Day of the Dead and later connected the youth in both communities, serving pupusas in Duluth and hot dogs in Los Ranchos.

To honor the struggle of women and raise awareness among our members, Sister Parish organized virtual events March 10-13 to mark International Women's Day.

These activities give us the opportunity to see familiar faces, share a good time with friends from a distance and learn from each other. We look forward to 2023, hopefully a year that will include both in-person and virtual events.



Day of the Dead offering at First Lutheran Church, Duluth.



Julieta Borja interprets for Conchita Mateo from UPAVIM during International Women's Day events.

# "A total exodus": A home community's perspective on migration

Excerpt from an interview with Pedro Sica  
from Guatemala.

If it were not for migration to the U.S., Guatemala would have exploded.

People are struggling with the high cost of living. Bus fares and the price of corn have doubled. A pound of beans costs up to 4 times more than it did two years ago. Tomatoes cost five times more. In 2021, Hurricanes Eta and Iota caused a lot of damage to the crops and the government did not provide any support. People only get by here with remittances.

Most people here have family members in the U.S. They went to look for work because they can't find work here. Trucks full of young people left during the pandemic, a total exodus. A lot of women left too. Most people

made it, though migrants from other communities died or disappeared on the way.

We are worried about what the governments of Central America, Mexico and the U.S. will do about migration. The international agreements don't make sense. They don't propose any real changes.

It would be possible to stop migration by reforming Guatemalan labor laws, but the government of Guatemala commits people to poverty wages instead of supporting them. If people could make enough to pay for healthcare, education, and housing, they wouldn't migrate anymore. Alternatively, if people could migrate to work for 6-12 months at a time and return, then things would change.



Duluth served pupusas for the Zoom call on migration with youth.



Danville Congregational Church organized a Sister Parish-themed service.



TN2 gave a virtual tour of the health clinic. "We have COVID vaccines for kids 6-11."

**"Being together like this gives us strength to keep going....  
I feel like I am with my family and spending time with you brings me joy."**

Consuelo Ayala, Los Ranchos

*After virtual event between Los Ranchos and Duluth First Lutheran Church*



Board members Bruce, Jan, Cathy, Patricia, Linda, Kate and former board member Luis met in Minnesota in June 2022.



San José la Montaña shares a Christmas carol during the virtual posada in 2021.

## Meet Madizon Scholarship student in Guatemala



Students in Guatemala face multiple barriers to education that were exacerbated by the pandemic. The high cost of technology and internet connection and the loss of instruction time were two particular pandemic challenges. Students in urban areas only have school 2 days a week even now.

Thanks to her own hard work, the support of her family, and a scholarship from partner community Downers Grove FUMC, Madizon graduated from high school in 2021. Sister Parish celebrates all the students, like Madizon, who continue to persevere. We share this excerpt from her letter:

Thank you for the great opportunity you gave me with the scholarship. With your support, I was able to achieve one more goal in my life. Because of the pandemic, my mom was left without a job, and my dad has been the one supporting our family economically. I pray to God that I will have the opportunity to study at the university. This is now a new goal in my life. "My shield is in God who saves the upright in heart" Psalms 7:10.

Sincerely, Madizon



# Chichipate

## *Presente en la lucha*

On January 23, 2022, Santo Domingo de Guzman church in Chichipate organized a mass to mark the 40th anniversary of the murder of 5 members of their community, as well as earlier the murder of catechist and land rights advocate Pablo Bac. The community honors their lives and hopes to gain recognition for their martyrs from the Catholic Church. The struggle for land rights in the community continues today.

Located on fertile land rich in minerals, the Maya Q'eqchi' people have defended their territory against wealthy landowners and other private interests with government power for hundreds of years.

In particular, the nearby mine has been a flashpoint since the 1960s. Last year, the government of Guatemala declared a state of siege after the population protested the mine's pollution and the lack of consultation with impacted Indigenous communities. Now, the trucks from the mine pass by Chichipate almost daily. Although the company offers projects to win over the local population, the community has seen those projects come and go, while also seeing the environmental degradation on land that is both sacred and a means of survival.

The community of Chichipate continues to fight for land rights, celebrate their martyrs, improve access to basic rights, and create options for youth, hoping to stem the alarming levels of migration that started with the pandemic and 2020 hurricanes.



Visit to Chichipate. Photo: Iximché Media

**“It makes me sad how they deceive people...They are taking our wealth to other countries...”**

**We want them to be responsible here, to leave us something besides pollution.”**

Lorenzo Cac, Chichipate



# Meet the new members of Sister Parish

## Ruth Garrido and Jorge Gómez

My name is Ruth Garrido. I worked with Sister Parish many years ago and it is a great pleasure to be back.

My work experiences with Sister Parish and life experiences with people from the south and north marked my process of professional growth and human growth. Then I had the opportunity to work for other educational and development institutions, I was able to add life experiences and knowledge to my human journey.

I am very happy to work with Sister Parish again and be able to support everyone with my experience. I am located in Guatemala City and I am very happy to be part of this program!

Ruth Garrido  
Regional Coordinator in Guatemala

My name is Jorge Gómez. I feel honored to be part of this team. It's been almost a year and I'm still learning new things every day. I've had the opportunity to meet so many awesome people from north and south, remarkable people who've been around Sister Parish for a long time and have so much love to share.

I've worked for over ten years with social organizations that seek to benefit those in need, either as a volunteer or employee. Whether in an office, a workshop or rural communities. I have learned a lot from the people I have met and they helped shape who I am today. With a degree in art and a specialization in ceramics, I've had the opportunity to travel, sharing the little I know and learning a lot from others.

There are lots of ideas and plans. I know our team will do great things to benefit the people we represent. It's just a matter of time.

Thank you all for your support, and thank you for believing in Sister Parish.

Jorge Gómez.  
Regional Coordinator in El Salvador.



Ruth and Carrie visit Basilia and Nicolás in San Andrés Itzapa.



Ruth and Jorge visit communities in rural Guatemala.

# Commemoration of the 42nd anniversary of the Sumpul River massacre



Cardinal Gregorio Rosa Chavez leading mass in Las Aradas.

On May 14, 2022 communities marked the anniversary of the massacre in Las Aradas, along the banks of the Sumpul River.

People who lived in the department of Chalatenango were some of the most affected by massacres and displacement during the armed conflict in El Salvador. On May 14, 1980, the army attacked the people who had started living in the Las Aradas area, many having fled from other communities to escape the violence. Over 600 people were killed that day in one of the largest single massacres of the armed conflict. Those who tried to escape by crossing the river were intercepted by the Honduran army. Some were detained and others were taken to the middle of the river and handed over to the Salvadoran army to be killed or detained.

For the 42nd anniversary this year, a large number of local, national and international organizations came together for commemoration. The plains of Las Aradas has now been established as a protected memorial park. A small forest of fir trees has been planted and a small chapel is under construction for future events. In the center of the field there is a disc covered with tiles representing the victims. The space where the disk is located was chosen specifically, because that is where the bodies were piled up.

The commemoration began in the early hours of Friday, May 13, with a pilgrimage and a ritual in the river. At night, survivors shared their testimonies, reflections, music, and theater. On Saturday, May 14, Cardinal Rosa Chávez presided over the Holy Mass, with the Bishop of Chalatenango, priests from other communities, and a delegation from Honduras, where many Salvadorans lived as refugees following the massacre.

The journey to reach Las Aradas involves a walk of approximately two hours through fields, mountains and rivers. This shows the commitment to commemorate the victims and reaffirms the resilience of the survivors.

Sister Parish and ACOMUJERZA were honored to accompany people from Guarjila, San José la Montaña and many other affected communities



Monument covered with tiles. Each tile represents a martyr, either by name or as an "unidentified victim".



# Holy Week 2022

For Sister Parish communities in Guatemala and El Salvador, Holy Week is the high holiday of the year. For many communities, the pandemic restrictions in place limited activities and participation for two years. This year, for the first time since the global pandemic began, communities held processions, decorated the streets with alfombras (decorative sawdust carpets), and gathered in community to mark this holy time.



Silent mass in Zaragoza, El Salvador.

Photo: Communications, Parroquia Nuestra Señora del Pilar



Holy Week procession in Las Margaritas 2, Guatemala.

Photo: Ricardo Choc.

## Communities in action

The pandemic is here and we continue to be careful, but the voices of those who struggling for their rights and survival will not be silenced. This year, the communities in Chalatenango, El Salvador have organized commemorations, religious activities, and community events.

In early March 2022, Guarjila hosted the event "Time to remember. Time to tell." The CCR organized the activity to create a space to talk about and honor the reality of those who lived in Mesa Grande, Honduras in the 1980s. There were testimonies from those who were raised in the refugee camps about their experience there and also the repopulation of their communities in El Salvador.

Photos: Top - Marleny Henriquez at "Time to remember" event.  
Bottom - Scholarship students in Guarjila plant trees for service day.



# Stay connected with Sister Parish

Stay connected with Sister Parish this year, as we plan virtual delegations, a Solidarity Walk posada, and Zoom conversations with community leaders in El Salvador and Guatemala. Contact us to start planning your next in-person delegation or U.S. tour stop in 2023. As communities face the impacts of climate change and inflation, Sister Parish continues to distribute emergency aid to member communities. We hope to hear from you soon about how you would like to be involved in our work to build community across borders!



Photo: Iximché Media

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