

IFCLA



The St. Louis
Inter-Faith
Committee on
Latin America

Inter-Faith Witness

438 N. Skinker Blvd * St. Louis, MO 63130 * 314.721.2977

ifcla@ifcla.net

www.ifcla.net

A faith-based source of information about events that shape our lives

Fall, 2007. Vol. 25, Issue #2

IFCLA CELEBRATES 25TH ANNIVERSARY

IFCLA was founded in the midst of the struggles in Central America by people from the solidarity movement who were part of the Greater St. Louis Latin America Solidarity Committee.

After the death of Archbishop Oscar Romero, faith-based activists joined together to respond to the cries from Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala to accompany them.

It has been an amazing journey. Hundreds of area churches, schools and communities have heard speakers, planned events, marched and rallied, risked arrest, traveled to various countries and formed relationships which have enriched, challenged and inspired.

On Saturday, December 1, 2007 friends gathered at Nerinx Hall High School in Webster Groves to celebrate, remember, and be energized for the next 25 years.

Elizabeth Ramos and Rogelio Salinas entertained while people did fair trade shopping for gifts from Partners for Just Trade, Plowsharing Crafts, and Guarjila Weaving & Embroidery,

Accomplishments were celebrated and former Program Coordinators were honored. Maggie Fisher came from Kentucky to the delight of her many friends.

A prayer service prepared for World Community Day was adapted for the occasion.

Dinner was shared appetizers or tapas.

The main speakers were Ellie Stock of Friends of La Oroya, Perú (project of the Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery) and Laurie Anderson, chair of the KC New Sanctuary Coalition.

Mexican dancers "La Morena" and Pablo Quesada led us in dancing which made everyone hungry for dessert. Of course, Bill Ramsey made one his amazing cakes to join the other desserts prepared by Core Committee members.

IFCLA is forever grateful for our faithful friends, generous donors, and persistent justice-seekers that are part of our history.

NEW SANCTUARY MOVEMENT PLEDGE

WWW.NEWSANCTUARYMOVEMENT.ORG

The New Sanctuary Movement is a coalition of interfaith religious leaders and participating congregations, called by our faith to respond actively and publicly to the suffering of our immigrant brothers and sisters residing in the US. We acknowledge that the large-scale immigration of workers and their families to the US is a complex historical, global and economic phenomenon that has many causes and does not lend itself to simplistic or purely reactive public policy.

'We stand together in our faith that

everyone, regardless of national origin, has basic common rights, including but not limited to: 1)livelihood; 2) family unity; and 3) physical and emotional safety. We witness the violation of these rights under current immigration policy, particularly in the separation of children from their parents due to unjust deportations, and in the exploitation of immigrant workers. We are deeply grieved by the violence done to families through immigration raids. We cannot in good conscience ignore such suffering and injustice.

Therefore, We Covenant to:

***Take a public, moral stand for Immigrants' rights .**

***Reveal, through education and advocacy, the actual suffering of immigrant workers and families under current and proposed legislation.**

***Protect immigrants against hate, workplace discrimination, and unjust deportation.**

La Oroya: Environmental Justice Commentary

The Joining Hands Environmental Task Force of the Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery is working to hold the Doe Run Co. of Maryland Heights, MO responsible for the "critically high" blood-lead levels among children in La Oroya Perú according to a SLU study.

Some connections can be

seen for our work:

- "Free trade" allows companies to avoid the higher safety standards and environmental protections of the US when they work abroad.
- Fewer freedoms to organize and protest in many host countries make it difficult for

persons affected to speak out alone on their behalf.

- The Peru Free Trade Agreement will come to a vote in the Senate soon, the House voted in favor of it, please ask your Senators to vote NO. Stop the exploitation of countries in the south.

"We are confronting a combination of toxic metals that are affecting an entire population."

*Dr. Fernando Serrano
St. Louis University,*



Earth, Air, Fire, Water: The Free Trade Dilemma

Plan Puebla Panama (PPP) is a mega project which seeks to open up the southern half of Mexico and Central America to private foreign investment and establishing the foundation for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). The plan depends upon multi-lateral development bank support and private investment to create infrastructure that will attract industry and expand natural resource extraction. With the Inter-American Development Bank as the head of the PPP's financial structure and major credit and technical assistance coming from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, among others, controversial projects have already begun. These are some of the concerns:

- Globalize the Americas through Free Trade Agreements (FTAA)
- Create vast elaborate infrastructure of ports, highways, airports, and railways aimed to connect the development of the petroleum, energy, maquiladora, and agricultural industries.
- Environmental activists fear that the exploitation of primary materials (minerals, timber, petroleum, biodiversity, and water) will lead to environmental degradation for exportation without profit being dispersed to local communities.
- The elimination of the ejido system, or communal land holdings, as guaranteed under Article 27 of the Mexican constitution, in order to further foreign investment under NAFTA, catalyzed the corporate consolidation of land in northern Mexico.
- Mesoamerica is now subject to mass privatization of genetic resources, as well as whole ecosystems, especially water.
- Mining for gold and other minerals will contaminate water and land.
- Ancestral lands are being converted into acres of African Palm for biofuels.
- Plans for beach resorts will destroy natural habitats & ecobalance.



Rio Abajo, Nicaragua

For further information:
www.globalexchange.org
www.corpwatch.org
www.organizconsumers.org
www.miningwatch.ca

Into the Bullets of the Avengers by Amanda Jokerst



*Afro-Colombian liberation dance
Photo: Amanda Jokerst*

Last month I traveled to Colombia with Christian Peacemaker Teams to learn about the country's decades-long conflict and to meet with local human rights defenders, grassroots organizers, non-violent resisters, and religious leaders to hear their stories of life amidst grave violence and horrific death. Colombia's long history of internal armed conflict has devastated the country. Around 75% of the population lives in poverty, natural resources and land are controlled by an extremely small majority, thousands upon thousands have been assassinated or disappeared, and nearly 3.8 million people have been displaced. Yet those who face the worst consequences from the brutal conflict are the youth of Colombia.

Hundreds of thousands of young people, primarily from rural areas and indigenous communities, have lost parents and family members to the conflict or have been forced off their land and into the impoverished neighborhoods, or poverty belts, that fringe Colombia's cities. Some are often targeted and assassinated in paramilitary social cleansing campaigns, while many others suffer forced recruitment by the illegal

armed groups and irregular recruitment by the Colombian Armed Forces. The youth, however, are refusing to be victims and become cannon fodder for this brutal war. They are creatively organizing against the violence to joyfully pursue the creation of a new kind of society: not one that is simply free from war, but a truly human community of life, dignity, and well-being. One group in particular, called Legion del Afecto (Legion of Affection), uses art, dance, music, and culture as an "alternative language" to give voice to political resistance. Through nonviolent public actions in neighborhoods hit hard by the conflict, they hope to reclaim those spaces for peace, to rescue thousands of young people from the war, and to fill the streets and playgrounds once again with the sounds of life.

One such action was done in response to the assassination of a young boy on the street just outside the youth's meeting place. Legion del Afecto held a solemn vigil through the street, handing out candles to people at their doorways to encourage them to join in solidarity in the path of light and hope they were

creating. Other actions have included a five-day Vigil for Life to respond to paramilitary death threat lists, a Carnival for Life to celebrate plurality and diversity, a Concert for Life which sold only local Colombian products to protest against multinational corporations, and an anti-militarist action at an Independence Day parade. Commenting on the purpose of these actions, one of the dancers said, "Our message is one of life and peace instead of death and violence. We want to show adults that it is possible to live without weapons of war and violence. We have to show them that there is an alternative."

Clearly, these are not naive children but mature young people who have a deep understanding of the world that is quite remarkable. Commenting on US foreign policy one of the leaders said, "The United States is an agent of violence around the world, and not just physical violence, but a violence which takes away everything that provides for life. The US is trying to impose its economic model around the world and in Colombia it manifests itself in a corrupt government and violently oppressive economic structures."

(cont. p. 6)

"The United States is an agent of violence around the world, and not just physical violence, but a violence which takes away everything that provides for life.."

Guarjila Celebrates 20 years as a Repopulated Community

On October 12, 1987, courageous Salvadoran refugees returned to their homeland from Mesa Grande, Honduras.

In January, 1988, a delegation from IFCLA visited Guarjila and made a companioning covenant with the community.

IFCLA hoped to lead a delegation to Guarjila in October to join in the celebrations, but things did not work out.

Maureen Crowley and Carl Ma... from the sister parish in Milwaukee, St. Therese carried our greetings and a

proclamation from Mayor Francis Slay, naming October 12, 2007 "20th Anniversary of the Repopulation of Guarjila in the City of St. Louis" Days.

We will have more news after the Easter Week immersion trip in 2008.



Photo: Marilyn Lorenz

Documentary on Ann Mangararo by Rodney Yarnal

This past summer my wife, Christen, and I spent 5 weeks in Guarjila, El Salvador, filming interviews for a documentary on Ann Mangararo. Ann was a Sister of Loretto, Catholic Worker, and pediatrician who went to Guarjila in 1988. El Salvador's civil war was raging, and she arrived shortly after a group of refugees repatriated Guarjila from Honduras to serve as their witness, protector, and physician.

I never had the opportunity to meet Ann, who died in 1993 at age 46 of

a recurrence of breast cancer, but I came to know her through the recollections of her friends at the Karen House Catholic Worker. I lived there in 2000, the year before I went to medical school. Her story inspired me. After medical school and into residency, I began talking with Ellen Regh, one of Ann's close friends, about doing a project to biography Ann. Ellen began work on a book focused on her visit to Guarjila shortly after Ann went there, and I began planning for a film documentary to chronicle her life.

In Guarjila, Ann divided her time between caring for the sick and training health promoters to provide health care in her absence and in other communities nearby. Each community's directive selected health promoters for their competence, intelligence, commitment, and willingness to perform this function. Over the course of her time in El Salvador, Ann trained about 200 health promoters; this was no small feat in a war-torn country. Further, most of the promoters were women, and Ann empowered them to heal.

bodies and communities. These women still figure prominently in their communities, providing leadership and health care.

Of course, we spent most of our time in Guarjila interviewing the health promoters, Ann's patients, and her friends. Marleny, Reinadi, Angelica, Estella, and Esperanza (the health promoters) offered their stories and recollections of Ann.

(cont. p. 6)

Suchitoto 13

On July 2, 2007, at a demonstration against the privatization of water, fourteen community leaders were detained and later brought up on charges of terrorism - which means they could be sentenced to many years in prison, simply for exercising

their right to peaceful protest. Pepper spray, tear gas and rubber bullets were used against unarmed men, women and children. Thirteen still face trial on terrorism charges. Full details about this incident can be found at www.share-elsalvador.org

"It was like a scene from the war, the soldiers with their armed cars; it was terrible, knocking down people; I believe that that is terrorism, terrorism of the State" - Lorena Martinez, President of CRIPDES



Photo: www.share-elsalvador.org

120 from IFCLA join 25,000 in Ft. Benning, GA



Photos by "Buck" Firth



Holy begeebers... I went to the "Close the School of the Americas" protest/vigil at Ft Benning, GA the weekend of Nov 16-18. Wow... talk about powerful. 25,000 people showed up to participate in rallies and a funeral march to remember those killed by SOA trained death squads (such as those dispatched by three of Guatemala's most vial presidents [read CIA backed Dictators]). It took nearly 3 hours for the Sunday funeral procession to finish - they read names of those known to have been killed by SOA assassins the entire time. By the time the procession led me to the Ft Benning gate, there were so many

crosses woven into the fence that I could hardly see through to the next gate where there was a sign posted saying "US Property- No Trespassing."

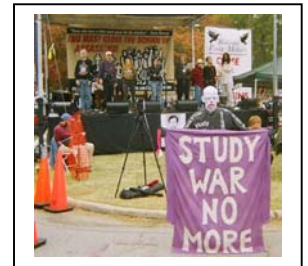
We had read a statement earlier to pledge to be peaceful in our thoughts and actions... and I slipped at that moment, slurring, through my tears, to a friend, "That's democracy, eh?"

Needless to say, I got a little worked up during my first, and very educational, trip to the vigil/protest at the School of the Americas. If you're not familiar with the place, educate yourself. I'm embarrassed enough of

our nation's involvements in past crimes against humanity – by closing down the SOA today, perhaps we'll be able to reduce the number of tomorrow's embarrassments.

Andy Heaslet
Coordinator of The Peace Economy Project

(Ten high schools and 8 universities/seminaries were represented this year! We are within 6 votes of cutting funding...)



Challenging Plan Colombia by Pat Chaffee

The House foreign aid bill significantly re-aligned U.S. aid to Colombia, changing the 80% military aid/20% humanitarian aid to 55% military and 45% humanitarian aid. While we advocate no military aid to Colombia, this Democratic-led change is a welcome step in the correct direction.

Our concerns about Colombia center on three: human rights violation, impunity, and environmental devastation.

❖ Human rights & impunity --computers with highly sensitive information were stolen from four human rights organizations --task forces are funded but do not carry out prosecution of groups who attack communities.

❖ Environment --\$2.5 million has been allocated to protect biodiversity but jungles are being planted in African palm and other export crops against the will of the residents and leads to increase CO².

[Pat participated in a Witness for Peace delegation entitled, *A People of Peace in a Country at War* in July. She visited the humanitarian zones of Urabá in Northwest Colombia, near the Panama border. She has a powerful story to tell. Contact her at patop1@juno.com to invite her speak to your group.]

"The people, however, not only are not protected, but continue to receive threats from paramilitary forces."



Photo by Pat Chaffee

Plan Mexico

ON TAKING office as Mexico's president last December, Felipe Calderón made a crackdown against drug gangs his first action. He was prompted by violence that has seemed to spiral out of control in the past few years, with hundreds of murders—and severed

heads dumped in public places. He sent the army into nine states, announced a reform of the police—and began talking to the United States about an aid package. (www.economic.com) In August, the plan was revealed for “the biggest US anti-narcotics effort

abroad” since the \$5billion program known as Plan Colombia. (Daniel Politi, www.slate.com) . This plan will cost \$1billion. Looking at the failure of Plan Colombia, it is important that we follow this program and challenge the militarization of Mexico.

“Will Plan Mexico be another Plan Colombia?”



Photo: www.mexicosolidarity.org

Manganaro documentary (from p. 4)

I was struck by their poise, and by the significant role that Ann played – and still plays – in their lives. We talked with Maria Chichilco, John Guilliani, Victoria, Dagoberto, and others. We heard stories of amazing courage, as well as tales of tragic sadness.

We filmed 22 hours of interviews. Ellen, her husband, and her two children joined us for 2 weeks. My time in El Salvador opened my eyes

to the devastation of the war, of “war” in general, and to the courage and tenacity of those we met. Even the clinic, which is the last community-run clinic in El Salvador, is a testament to Ann’s vision and to the health promoters’ skill and efficacy. Watch for the film to be released in about a year, and for the book not far after that!

Rodnay can be reached at rodneyclinic@gmail.com

Chiapas (from p. 7)

The hired workers on the other hand, no matter how often they were invited to eat, refused to join us at the table, worked continually, and treated us with constant deference.

The youngest workers, just fifteen, would watch with wonder as Ghana imaginatively tromped through the woods. If they would have just joined us for lunch, I could have imagined that our efforts to serve were somehow breaking down the centuries of racism and exclusion which was their unlucky inheritance. Yet as generous as they were, these men were not to grant me such an illusion. While they believed in the project, they were clearly working for a paycheck, and with jobs so rare they were determined to impress. It made my stomach turn when I realized just how little they were earning for all their hard work, the going rate, which was only about eight dollars a day.

To make matters worse, these men lived at the project all week since they had to travel so far to reach their homes. I thought a lot about covertly adding to their income, but I hadn’t come to meddle with Richard’s project, and I realized there was so much that I didn’t understand. It was a consolation that the whole goal of the project was to provide good, skilled jobs to the local people in a cooperative model. As I came to know the families surrounding the project, each expressed a desperate need for jobs that might pay enough to live on. I hope The Chiapas Project will provide this for some, for the other thing so many spoke of was the probability of having to “follow us home” to find work to feed their families.

Carolyn is a founder of Kabat House and can be contacted at 588-8351, or cdgriffeth@yahoo.com



Bullets of Avengers (from p. 3)

But a new model is being proposed. It is one of hope and of a different sort of vision for society. These young people know their “weapons” of choice can speak to the human sensibility in ways more powerful than any gun, threat, or torture. The war may not be over. I cannot deny that in many regions it still rages on, savagely destroying communities

and the environment. Yet the children and youth still dream of a better tomorrow, for “into the bullets of those called avengers” they are inserting the creative magic of music, art, and culture, the magic of nonviolent resistance.

Amanda will begin working for CPT in January.



Photo: www.mexicosolidarity.org

Eyewitnesses in Chiapas by Carolyn Griffith

Chiapas project: <http://thechiapasproject.org/>

Have you ever thought about volunteering in Central America or Mexico as a family? This past summer my husband and I along with our two sons, Ghana (13) and Finn (2) volunteered eight weeks in Chiapas. Our motivation for going begins with the adoption of our two-year-old who is Mayan Guatemalan though St. Louis born. While pregnant, his birth-mother emigrated to the US to earn money for her family and future back home. She is a friend of ours and we share the hope of maintaining Finn's relationship with his Mayan family and culture. It was clear to us that going was the first step to building a relationship, to forging an understanding of his birth-culture, as well as to improving our Spanish.

Where to go was the next question. Naturally, we wanted to go to Guatemala but many wizened travelers had warned us otherwise. It wasn't so much the rings of bandits and rash of woman abductions and killings that concerned them, but rather the kidnappings, some for international adoption rings. For this reason, we were unanimously advised not to travel in Guatemala with Finn, since locals might understandably

perceive him as stolen.

So we set our sights on Chiapas, a land rich in Mayan culture, but without the *same* legacy of violence and child trafficking. Next we sought to find a project lead by others who are rooted in Chiapas and who understand the culture. By volunteering on an existing project we hoped to avoid raising false hopes or making decisions that would affect other people's lives. Being Catholic Workers ourselves, we were acquainted with Richard Flamer, formerly part of the Catholic Worker in Des Moines, who has lived and worked with the indigenous in Chiapas for many years. His wife, Araceli, is an indigenous woman from Oaxaca. Their current project is building carpentry, welding, and block-making collective in a highland area where many displaced Chamulans live. Sadly, these former residents of San Juan Chamula, had been forcibly displaced by their neighbors because of their Protestant faith and abstinence from alcohol. Alcohol and Coca-Cola distribution has long been linked to political power in many indigenous villages of Chiapas.

Richard welcomed us to

come join-in his work with the understanding that the work we would be doing would be common, not exalted. Of course this is what we desired: to live and work in solidarity with the local people.

Our two months working on The Chiapas Project proved to be a great experiment in solidarity. We worked each day along side indigenous hired workers and did such jobs as hauling gravel in wheelbarrows to repair a road that was continually collapsing and using picks to clean-up hardened cement from the workshop floor. Our son Ghana, joined us when he wasn't chasing dogs or practicing his sling-shot. Meanwhile the paid workers mixed cement by hand into buckets that were carried up hand-made ladders to be pored into molds which they constructed from rough lumber. In this mode they built the entire shop and Richard's and Araceli's future home.

Like the hired workers we sometimes developed sore backs and blistered hands, but otherwise our realities were uncomfortably different. We took breaks freely, enjoyed a long lingering lunch, and returned when we wanted to our comfortable apartment in San Cristobal. (cont. p. 6)

"The Chiapas Project proved to be a great experiment in solidarity."



**Inter-Faith
Committee on
Latin America**



IFCLA receives funding from Justice and Peace Shares:
www.jps-stl.org

BUSINESS ADDRESS
438 N. Skinker
St. Louis, MO 63130

PHONE:
314-721-2977

FAX:
314-726-6427

E-MAIL:
ifcla@ifcla.net

We're on the Web!

See us at:
www.ifcla.net

IFCLA Plowsharing Night is December 12 5:30-9:00pm

IFCLA will receive up to 20% of the purchases made at **Plowsharing Crafts** in the Delmar Loop! **Plowsharing Crafts**, located at 6271 Delmar, has a variety of beautiful items, which are hand-crafted by people around the world. All items are fair-trade, and the profits go directly to the artisans. During the holidays, the store chooses to also share some of the profits with local non-profit organizations.

Make a difference
GLOBALLY and
LOCALLY
by doing holiday
shopping on
WEDNESDAY
December 12th!
**PLOWSHARING
CRAFTS**
6721 Delmar

From Plowsharing Crafts' website, www.plowsharing.org:
"Plowsharing Crafts has provided meaningful income to Third World Crafts People by marketing their products in St. Louis. Plowsharing Crafts works with Ten Thousand Villages and other craft organizations that give jobs and fair pay to people that would otherwise be unemployed or underemployed. Craft purchases in the past year provided the equivalent of more than 200 full-time jobs."

Other Craft Fairs Where IFCLA will be Present

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2: 9:30am -4:00pm> College Church Ballroom
Grand and Lindell (to help their sister parish in Guatemala)

SUNDAYS, DECEMBER 9 & 16: 9:30am-12:30pm>Evangelical United
Church of Christ, Lockwood and Plant in Webster Groves, MO 63119

INVITE IFCLA TO GIVE IMMIGRATION PRESENTATIONS

The Immigration Task Force of IFCLA is eager to come to your congregation, club, church, or living room to give presentations about the current crisis in immigration. We have a powerpoint prepared by MIRA (Missouri Immigrant and Refugee Advocates) and testimonies which will help dispel the fears and confront the true issues. Immigration reform is a hot button election issue for which we all must form an opinion. We hope that we can add a positive piece to the puzzle.
CALL THE IFCLA OFFICE TO SET A DATE or SEND AN EMAIL: ifcla@ifcla.net