

Go, Be With, Share Bread:  
A Similar Call to Accompaniment in a New Era  
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December 26<sup>th</sup> 2009. Another horrible murder in Cabañas! How can this be?  
What year is it? 2009 -2010 or 1980?  
Am I in a dream?  
I pinch myself.  
No.... this is real. This is war  
.....again.

I let myself feel the rage and frustration that Oscar Romero felt who, on June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1979, said: “Nobody is safe in this country: here there is nothing to do but keep your mouth shut and watch in silence as they kill your family, or wait for the same fate yourself.”

I felt that rage way back in the 1980's ,when along with hundreds of others, we answered SHARE’s call to accompaniment. Accompaniment has three Latin roots: to go, be with and share bread. During the war we learned that standing with a Salvadoran gave them protection for at least a few days. But we also found that once you share bread you cannot walk away. Accompaniment demands advocacy. The war was our awakening and, like Romero, we found our voice and used it. We used it in the halls of our US Congress and State Department, demanding that US funding of the Salvadoran military be stopped immediately and that the lives of ordinary civilians be protected. We spoke to anyone who would listen. Following Romero's example, we became the voice of the voiceless against giant oppressors. Davids against Goliaths. The solidarity movement against a rich, powerful, amoral, ruthless military, a government of self interested, wealthy, powerful elites, a US government that believed it was protecting El Salvador from becoming a communist front in the Americas.

It took years of faxes and telegrams and visits (plus the dissolution of the Soviet Union) to bring peace and a chance to rebuild. We danced in the streets of El Salvador on January 16<sup>th</sup> 1992. Peace at last!

But things don’t go from black to white overnight. For our brothers and sisters, it has been a tough slog. No jobs, too many guns on the streets, deported gang members setting up new turfs and a right wing government that still believed the theory of trickle down economics. As my dear friend Jean Stokan aptly pointed out almost immediately “only the bullets look different.”

But what did look different after 1992 was the organization and courage of the poor Salvadoran. The war helped them find their voices. They formed committees and local organizations that demanded land titles, agrarian credit, water and electricity, schools and roads, equality for women. Through SHARE, our accompaniment over the past 30 years has been primarily one of encouragement and support for these advocacy campaigns.

But now it’s 2010, and the nightmare returns. It’s not a dream...again people are being disappeared and murdered. This time over a fight to protect their environment. David against Goliath. Campesinos against the multinational Pacific Rim Mining Corp.

These small, local organizations slew the giant. A year ago they convinced the church, the general assembly and finally the president that gold mining must not be allowed in El Salvador. Pacific Rim was denied the permits necessary to begin mining operations in El Salvador.

That was the status of the anti-mining situation when were when 12 of us from Maryland took off from

Baltimore, bound for San Salvador on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009. It was another step for me in the 23-year, life-changing faith journey that has taken me to El Salvador more times than I can count. Along with several other veterans on this delegation, there were also new delegates, eager and anxious about what they would see, learn and feel.

There was a plan, but, as so often happens, things changed immediately after we arrived. We were told that an anti-mining activist and community leader Marcelo Rivera had been disappeared. The local organizers needed accompaniment in Cabañas... Would we go?

No doubt the new members of our delegation were confused – we all were anxious and worried. What about our plans and preparation? Was this really our role? Was it safe?

To be in El Salvador is to walk in the footsteps of Romero. We reflected on his words .... “The church cannot remain silent before injustice: to remain silent is to be an accomplice” July 24, 1977. Of course we went!

In Cabañas, we met with Marcelo’s brother Miguel and fellow members of ASIC, an anti mining committee in Marcelo’s native San Isidro. We met with the members of ADES, the Association for Social and Economic Development. They had the characteristic Salvadoran resolve to defeat a giant multinational conglomerate, against all the odds. In the moment, the prime focus was worry about Marcelo Rivera’s fate. As representatives of international solidarity, would we accompany their advocacy efforts? Down to the last person, our delegation couldn’t help but be moved, and we couldn’t help but be activated.

Within an hour, we accompanied these courageous people to the attorney general’s office in Cabañas and demanded a more intense and immediate search for Marcelo. On our return to San Salvador, we met with the US Charge d’Affairs to insist that he personally speak to the attorney in charge of the investigation at the national level. And then we waited..... In a matter of days, our hearts sank when we learned that Marcelo Rivera had been found tortured brutally and killed.

We left El Salvador resolved to continue to act. Accompaniment and solidarity had been transformed from an abstract concept to a reality.

SHARE brought a delegation of Salvadorans representing the national coalition against mining to Baltimore. They spoke at our churches and travelled the United States, spreading the word about what mining is doing to their part of the world. When word came from SHARE of more killing in Cabañas, we accelerated our advocacy efforts, with letters delivered personally to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.... and we are now working out a way to try to influence the Pacific Rim Mining Corp.

What next? Who knows? We only know that we have a commitment to accompany ... *to go...to be with...and to share bread* with our Salvadoran brothers and sisters.... whatever it takes.