

Winter 2010

# FIAT *Happenings*

*Dear Friends of the Mission*

*Our volunteers certainly know how to think outside the box. From Canada comes the newest idea to help families in poor areas of El Salvador: buy a goat to give to a family to raise, and you get to name it. We already have a Mike, L-Train, Karate Kid, Ringo and are hoping for more. The family has its own source of vitamin rich milk that the children can drink, or they can sell some of it to neighbors. Goats eat anything so you only have to put them out to graze during the day and bring them back at night.*



*Closer to home in the USA we have volunteers also working on having people buy food for a poor family for a month ($50) or buy lunch for a month for a school child ($20). Our lunch program cost us $600 per month or about $15 - $20 a month to feed one child lunch every school day. Now we have between 35 – 40 children per day that we feed, and we have a long waiting list. The school has already noticed better work and attendance by the children who are part of the program. Parents tell me that the lunch they receive is the best meal of the day and that on the weekend when the program is not functioning, many children get nothing more to eat than a tortilla, the bread of El Salvador.*



*There is a dream to bring water to every house in the Canton de Las Delicias and one of our volunteers contacted Engineers Without Boarders and got them interested in helping in El Salvador. We have already had engineers down for two site visits, and they are working on a plan to help the village.*

*When people tell Lynette and me what wonderful work we do, we know that the credit belongs to our volunteers. Our volunteers and benefactors are the backbone of our FIAT Projects. Without them the clinic, library, houses for the poor, day care center, green houses, chapel etc. would not be a reality and over 100 children would not be attending school. Our prayers and thanks go out to the many volunteers and benefactors who have helped to make our mission possible.*

*Sister Gloria Petrone acj*

## Completed Building Project

***Miguel's old house built of sheets of aluminum***





***Miguel's new house built with cinder block***





## *BEYOND THE CLASSROOM*

The Grove School is a small, co-ed therapeutic boarding school in Madison, CT. We serve students who have had a history of social and emotional issues including depression, anxiety, mood disorders, and academic problems. Our students come from all over the country to attend supportive college-prep classes, engage in individual and group therapy, and participate in a wide variety of activities. One of the unique components to our programs has been the ASTEE (Alternative Site Therapeutic and Educational Experience) program. For over 20 years, we have been offering opportunities to expand the boundary of the classroom walls with off-campus trips for students to experience the world, learn about each other and themselves. In 2008, one of our staff members, Caitlin Jones, introduced the idea of taking students to El Salvador to volunteer with Project FIAT and the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Initially, this seemed like a daunting idea. We had never participated in an extended service trip, and we had concerns that the nature of the trip might be too emotionally and physically demanding for our students. Despite our initial concerns, the trip was met with overwhelming enthusiasm from our students. Within months, we had a group who eagerly volunteered and the rest of our small community was working to collect money and donations for the trip. The preparation brought our community together in a unique way, and the energy behind the trip was remarkable.



Our first trip consisted of 10 students and 3 staff members and though we spent months preparing, I don't think any of us knew what an impact the experience would have on us. Our students have struggled mightily throughout their childhood and adolescence with emotional issues, yet they were able to step aside from their own problems and give to others in a way they didn't know they could. Students who might have typically lacked motivation or confidence to speak up were leading songs and dances with the children of Las Delicias. Our first trip had two girls who had been internationally adopted from orphanages, and as they connected and shared with the children in the orphanage, it became a profound, life-altering experience.

Since that first trip, we have taken two other groups to San Salvador and have made it a yearly part of our ASTEE calendar. We are planning another trip at the end of March, and the list is already full with returning and new students and staff. Our involvement in the program has helped reinforce a value of helping others and being a "voice for the voiceless" in daily life at Grove School. It has provided a framework and perspective for students to do their own emotional work here at Grove. Several students have chosen to study related subjects in college based on their experiences. Grove's philosophy is based on building relationships with others. Through our work with Project FIAT, our students have had the opportunity to build valuable relationships with each other, Sister Gloria, Lynette, and with the people of El Salvador.

Kelly Webster

# Future Building Project

***Build a home for Santiago and his family***









*At the end of each day we reflected on what we did, where we had been, who touched our hearts and spirits, and how we felt being with the Salvadoran people… the people Oscar Romero loved and gave his life for. Never did I expect to be so moved by a story of an initially reluctant cleric, who in the face of profound injustice, found his voice and the courage to stand up to a right wing government engaged in systematic cruelty and torture of the poor. He took a hard stance among his ambivalent ecclesiastical peers, declaring Jesus a Liberator, and challenging all who believed in him to treat the poor with dignity and respect.*
*MaryFran Stulginsky*



*I learned some new skills in El Salvador such as mixing and pouring cement and building a cinder block wall. But I also learned to appreciate the life with which I have been blessed, to be more compassionate when interacting with other people, and to enjoy some of the simpler things in life such as peanut butter and banana sandwiches.*
*Linda Walker*









## *RETHINKING "IMPORTANT"*

When I first traveled to El Salvador in the winter of 2007, I felt fairly confident about my purpose. I was there to build houses, to make a difference, to do something "important." But as it so often goes with expectations, I was quite off the mark.

This became clear to me during my first day in Las Delicias when we were dropped outside of a medical clinic. I assumed we would be painting, laying bricks, banging hammers into plywood. But when we looked around, it was apparent to everyone that a more pressing issue stemmed from the thick growth of unruly weeds covering the yard. And so, instead of doing something "important" that day, that is what we took on. With semi-dull machetes, thick gloves and a rusty wheelbarrow we pruned the yard so that it was a nicer place for people to come see a doctor. The next day was my day with the children. Instead of teaching them English or helping them with schoolwork or doing any other sort of activity that would generally fall into the category of "important," we made paper mache balloons. It was organized chaos. Half of the projects wound up with more dirt on them than they did newspaper but the laughs and touches along the way left me with a different understanding of "important" than I had anticipated.

My first week in El Salvador passed exactly this way: a lot of half-finished projects, a lot of hugs, a lot of laughs. So different than the goal-oriented, deadline-driven life that I, and so many others, lead at home. The difference that I thought I'd make in El Salvador would not lie in the construction of a house or the donation of money or the furtherance of a child's education. The difference in my life, and I hope in the lives of some of the people I have met over the past three years, would lie in the imprint we have made on each other. It is a mindset that takes some getting used to but it is one, I think, that is quite "important" after all.

Kate Barker







HANDMAIDS OF THE
SACRED HEART OF JESUS
MISSION CENTER
1242 SOUTH BROAD STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19146

NONPROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE PAID
PHILADELPHIA PA
PERMIT NO. 6862

MAILING ADDRESS LINE 1
MAILING ADDRESS LINE 2
MAILING ADDRESS LINE 3
MAILING ADDRESS LINE 4
MAILING ADDRESS LINE 5

***PROJECT FIAT***
***2011 TRIP DATES***

***Feb 26-March 5***
***March 5-12***
***March 12-19***
***March 23-30***
***April 2-8***
***May 17-May 26***
***May 28-June 4***
***June 5-13***
***June 14-22***
***June 23-July 1***
***July 2-10***
***July 11-19***
***July 20-28***

***www.projectfiat.org***

