

Reflection:

I am twenty-six years old and by American "standards," I have all the trappings of success and happiness: a great job, new car, apartment in the city, and fantastic family/friends. Yet, I felt so broken and unhappy for the last several months. Before leaving St. Louis, I had coffee with my best friend. We chatted about my travel plans and I smiled and said, "I feel like something incredible is about to happen." I didn't know then that my life would forever be changed by my experiences in El Salvador.

After the death of my father in 2003, I had really struggled with my faith. I had been so mad at God that I truly tried to shut him out of my life. He found me in El Salvador! I could feel him working within me and my group for those 8 days.

I learned success and happiness are not about status, jobs, emails, designer shoes, or new cars. Rather, happiness is being present in the moment. It is sharing a smile at the completion of a puzzle. Success is a high-five after scoring a goal on the soccer field. It's making bracelets for new friends. Happiness is listening to the laughter of little boys when plotting their next move in checkers. Success is teaching expectant mothers what is in store for them in the next nine months. Happiness is playing ring-around-the-rose so many times that you're too dizzy to stand. Success comes when 20 adults can dig the "perfect hole" for a septic system. Happiness is dancing with old & new friends like no one is watching. Success is being witness to God's presence in every interaction.

At the UCA, Dean Brackley S.J., said, "You came to El Salvador to do good work. Most likely you will fall in love, get your heart broken, and you will forever be ruined." That statement is so very true. I am blessed to have fallen in love with God all over again. My heart did break to see the hunger and poverty- to know there's so much more I could do there. Ruined- I will be forever ruined and long for the day when I can return to El Salvador to see the children.

Their laughter still rings in my ears. It is my reminder that I have work to do- something greater than me is calling me to do good work. The mission trip was the most amazing avenue on my journey of life to date!