



Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad

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Building Community – Building Dignified Homes: CIS’s integral approach to work in solidarity is changing people’s lives and changing their community.

San Salvador, June 2021

Dear Friends,

We hope you and your communities are healthy and coming out of the pandemic with strengthened solidarity and awareness of our inter-connectedness via health, the environment, technology, and community. El Salvador, too, is slowly coming out of the pandemic with a mass vaccine program. ***I am writing to ask for your support to continue building community and dignified homes and addressing the root causes of migration and gang violence.***



Maribel is the sole breadwinner, sustaining her three children and grandchild. She makes less than minimum wage, at a bakery, and would never have the means to build a dignified home. (Before and After)

El Salvador is going through a major shake-up, as results from the February elections gave the New Ideas Party a qualified majority (2/3) and, including their allies, an absolute majority (3/4) of the deputies in the Legislative Assembly. The traditional political parties took a major hit with ARENA winning only 14 and the FMLN only four of 84 legislative deputies. The population voiced a clear message for change. Some of the abrupt changes made since the new assembly was sworn in on May 1st have caused discontent internationally, as well as within traditional power sectors and human rights groups in El Salvador. Nevertheless, according to polls, these changes are supported by the majority of the Salvadoran population.

Independently of who holds political power nationally or locally, the CIS has always accompanied communities to ask local and national authorities for support. We re-affirm our mission of solidarity, transformation, and accompanying the most economically and socially excluded communities so that they can have the tools to build an El Salvador they believe in. These include the tools of education, clean water, respect for the environment, dignified housing, women’s businesses, democratic elections, and opportunities to be empowered actors in the construction of justice and dignity.

CIS has addressed the root causes of migration since we were founded, first by creating markets for Salvadoran artisans who believed their only opportunity to build a dignified home was to go to the United States to work for a few years. They persistently asked CIS for help getting a visa. *Once we started selling their products, they never asked again.* Then massive waves of migration began after Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and the 2001 earthquakes. CIS was primarily focused on accompanying human rights struggles (denouncing assassination, forgiveness of the land debt, and non-privatization of public services), but the leaders of these struggles were leaving the country. So we consulted with the communities we worked with, explaining that we can *accompany* human rights struggles but CIS cannot be the motive force. We explained that it is difficult to organize if all the leaders are migrating. The community members told us they did not want to migrate, but they could not afford to put beans and rice on the table. With that feedback, the CIS began to focus on social and economic rights – developing programs of scholarships, women's enterprises, clean water, and most recently dignified homes. Social programs and economic empowerment give Salvadorans the tools to be able to stay in their country and be active in community development and human rights.

Community Building – Home Building – CIS as a solidarity organization Romero Community Experience

CIS is not a home-building NGO. We are a solidarity organization. Our priority is to *build communities* most in need who are willing to organize and be actors in their transformation. Building homes grew out of accompanying the Romero Community in their 10-year struggle to get title to the land. They *built their community* without land security despite 10 years of getting the run-around and false promises. The CIS accompanied this *community-building* effort first with a few scholarships. Our CIS scholarship program traditionally covered only high school and university scholarships, but we realized that youth join gangs before high school if they do not have any other alternative. **St. Elizabeth** got involved as a sister parish and took the initiative to raise enough funds to provide scholarships starting at pre-school. As we got to know the community, we realized most of the mothers were heads of household and many could not read or write. CIS organized literacy courses and 15 women graduated from 6th grade. We worked with women to cultivate organic indigo and vegetables to generate income and food sovereignty. In 2015, when they finally got the title to their land, we immediately began fundraising and getting permits to build 65 dignified homes, potable water, and a septic system in each home. CIS was able to complete the project with the support of generous donors, foundations, and a few miracles conceded from San Romero in 2017. *The youth are not migrating or joining the gangs as new opportunities emerge and a new self-image of dignity is developed.*



Clean Water

Participation

Education

Art & Mental Health

Paso Puente Community – A dignified home is a human right!



Before and After

Then our solidarity partners began to ask us about the community Paso Puente across the street, a community of 153 families with similar deplorable conditions – no potable water; no sewage; houses made from plastic, tin, and bedsprings; single mothers who could not read or write; kids on the street instead of in school; and additionally, a community filled with gang members due to complete social exclusion. The community was not organized and did not trust one another – much less CIS. We also knew we did not have the ability to do this on our own, since the community is three times the size of Romero Community, and we did not have international relationships established there, like we did in Romero over the course of a decade.

CIS requires that communities be actively engaged in their transformation to build a partnership. Because of their dire conditions, Paso Puente did not meet those criteria. So, we decided to start with scholarships to build leadership, trust, and organization in 2017. We accompanied them to form a community council and ask for potable water from the government, but like Romero Community, they were repeatedly denied. We organized art and mental health gatherings to build trust in the community and to get the youth to dream a different future. The youth expressed to us that they saw their only options as migrating or joining the gang. Just because of their address, they were denied dignified employment. When a new government came to power in 2019, and CIS accompanied them again to ask for potable water, the new government immediately responded and visited. Seeing the conditions, they agreed to work in partnership with CIS and Paso Puente – not only to provide water, but dignified housing, sewage, and streets. In October 2019 we began to build homes with support from the Salvadoran Government for the first time.



Since then, in Paso Puente, CIS has completed 85 dignified homes, provided 48 scholarships, organized literacy classes for the mothers, organized art and mental health workshops with over 200 participants, and gotten several kids in school who were roaming the streets or who had slight disabilities and were not previously welcome in the schools.

Sara, a single mother, and her 3 children need your support!

Still, this is just the beginning – We need your support to continue to accompany this community transformation!



- CIS needs to raise \$100,000 for the next 40 dignified homes! Each house is about \$8,000 (they have gone up \$500 due to cost of materials). The Salvadoran Government is putting in \$3,500 per home, plus water and sewage. **Homes from the Heart** has agreed to put in \$2,000 per home. (Thank you!) **So the CIS needs to raise \$2,500 per home!** You can provide a dignified home to a family for just \$2,500! No donation is too big or too small: \$1500 will build a complete bathroom; \$600 will tile the floor; \$400 will pay for electrical installation; and \$50 will provide doors for the home.

- With each home we build, we meet new children who are not in school for various reasons – the majority are economic; also disabilities; parents who cannot read or write often do not see the reason to send their kids to school; or the youth need to work. When we started with a few scholarships in 2017, no one had been

to high school. Currently there are 48 students on scholarship: one is in university, 6 are in high school, and 41 are in kinder–9th grade, **thanks to Holy Spirit Parish in Kansas City!!!** Still, with the number of students who want to study, we cannot cover the demand. We need an additional sister relationship and/or individual donations: \$1,000 a year will provide a university scholarship (two will graduate from high school this year and aspire to go on to university), and we have 20 new students applying for pre-school to high school scholarships at \$300 year. If we raise \$8,000 total, it will cover the need for **new** Paso Puente scholarships in 2022. **Education is the most powerful tool for the families to maintain their homes and to get out of extreme poverty.**

Please consider donating to solidarity and transformation:

- **\$2,500 builds a dignified home (combined with government and Homes from the Heart donations),**
- **\$1,500 builds a complete bathroom,**
- **\$1,000 for an annual university scholarship or \$300 for an annual high school scholarship, and**
- **\$50 buys doors for a home or a 2-month high school scholarship.**

Thank you for being part of this social transformation and addressing the root causes of immigration to give people the opportunity to stay in their own country!

In Solidarity,

Leslie Schuld, CIS Director, LOS OLIVOS CIS Legal Representative in El Salvador

How to donate: **Tax deductible donations can be made payable to and mailed to: Los Olivos CIS (in U.S. dollars) / PO Box 76 / Westmont, IL 60559-0076, USA.**

Debit/credit card donations can be made online:

<https://www.cis-elsalvador.org/donate>

PLEASE NOTE DIGNIFIED HOUSING, SCHOLARSHIPS FOR PASO PUENTE ON YOUR CHECK OR ON-LINE DONATION, OTHER DESIGNATION, OR WHERE MOST NEEDED.

For more information:

Toll free number in U.S.: 1-866-887-2665; El Salvador: ++ 503-2226-5362

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