

Dear friends,

In November my son and I will travel on an open delegation with Sister Parish, Inc. to El Salvador and Guatemala. “Why would anyone travel to El Salvador or Guatemala, given the conditions described in current media?” you might ask yourself. Or perhaps “why should I support an organization like Sister Parish when there are so many pressing needs for Salvadorans and Guatemalans waiting [detained] at our Southern border?” The answer to these questions is solidarity.



The Sister Parish model of building long-term relationships between communities in the U.S. and El Salvador or Guatemala doesn't hide or sugarcoat the socio-economic or socio-political reality (or history) of any country or government involved (many Central Americans ask the same question about traveling to the U.S.). Instead, it fosters a space for mutual learning and seeing one another's humanity. For many delegates traveling on North to South delegations, learning the hard truths about U.S. involvement in El Salvador's or Guatemala's current problems can be challenging and embarrassing. For our hosts, though, this is an opportunity to give us knowledge and a better understanding of them and their reality. They are also incredibly grace-filled and reassure us that the delegates didn't make these decisions, the government did. That doesn't absolve any of us of a responsibility to use this newfound knowledge, however. It is expected that once we know better, we will do better.

People who have traveled on Sister Parish delegations recognize the humanity of the Central Americans currently being detained on the Southern U.S. border because they have been invited into their homes, slept in beds that they gave up, shared meals with their families, shared stories and dreams, and played with their children (or they are the children). For Sister Parish participants, the people on the border are not a number, a sad reality, or an abstract concept. The people seeking asylum have faces and stories that we recognize. In this context, the work of Sister Parish is absolutely urgent.

After the delegation I/we will be sharing what we learned and how we can move forward as grace-filled people, seeking to do better. I invite you to join us [time, date, and place yet TBD]. In the meantime, if you would like to contribute to the costs of participating in the delegation, please write a check to “Sister Parish, Inc.” and get it to Alejandro Alfaro-Santiz or Maria Van Der Maaten by September 15.

With gratitude,

Maria Van Der Maaten & Luca Alfaro

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