



*The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there. Zechariah 8:5*

*Verse on the wall of the Tierra Blanca Community Centre, El Salvador.*

### Greetings from Central America!

We have been privileged to have meaningful visits with all our Central America partners. Also, an important part of our work includes introducing Canadian churches to our partners and the work of the church here – we have been encouraged with several visiting SENT teams. We have also had opportunities to “be flexible”, God’s plans sometimes supersede ours, but it all turns out for the best.



San Salvador skyline

**Guatemala** held elections in June, and the run-off for president in August of this year. Guatemalans overwhelmingly supported a little-known politician, Bernardo Arevalo, from a party aptly named Semillas (seeds), elected on his promise to rid the country of the corruption that has affected every level of society for decades. The President-elect is due to take office in January 2024, but the current government has been doing its best to frustrate that transition. Following an illegal raid on the electoral offices and the removal of ballots and election results, the people took to the streets, erecting blockades on all major routes, demanding that democracy be respected and at least three members of the “pact of the corrupt” resign. At its peak, people could not access food, gas, or money. The current power holders have not made any concessions despite the protests. Certainly, people have hope that change is possible, but fear the will of the people will not be allowed given the long history of previous governments.

For us, this meant a prolonged stay in neighbouring El Salvador where we had been since Sept 29 to accompany a visiting Canadian church. As we travel by car, it had not been possible to return to our home

about 8 hours away in Guatemala. We travelled October 22, when all the blockades were temporarily removed. Restrictions are back up this week. While not in our original plans, this extra time in El Salvador was a blessing as we spent time with our each of our four partners, participating in their planned activities and visiting communities where CBM supported church initiatives are implemented.

**El Salvador** proclaimed a “State of Exception” (martial law) 17 months ago. The government boasts a reduction in murders from more than 100 homicides /100K population (over 6,000 in 2015), to an estimated 2.4/100K in 2023. El Salvador leaders are boasting the murder rate is so low, it is almost equal to Canada’s! This law suspends legal rights, including rights to health care, family visits, trial date, etc. Some 72K gang members have been captured in the last 17 months.

We have travelled to El Salvador for many years – the changes are striking. Families walk freely in their neighborhoods, business activity is extortion-free, and there is little military or police presence in public spaces. While many Salvadoreños celebrate the increased security, some are mourning the loss of human rights and detention of family members (who may have been only peripherally connected to gangs) caught up in the crackdown. Meanwhile issues of poverty, violence, poor education, lack of job opportunities for young people and a challenging economy continue to impact people.



Pastor Nelson educating us about the changes in his community and ministry focus resulting from the “State of Exception”

So where is the church during these overwhelming challenges? We continue to be humbled by the

faithfulness of God's people as they serve where God has placed them. We see all our church partners active in helping their church members develop their biblical knowledge and actively participating in building the kingdom of God. Local churches are engaging with their community, caring for children at risk, families are being helped to improve their economic situation, and church and community leaders are being challenged to take responsibility for caring for their environment.



*Semillas and the community of Chalchuapa reaching kids with love and hope.*



*ENLACE chicken farmer in the village of Rodriguez telling us how this enterprise has impacted his family*



*Naomi, future Dr.*

Naomi is the eldest of five children being supported by their mom. She receives tutoring help, and love and encouragement at a homework club. She wants to be a doctor, which is a possibility since she can travel to the high school that had previously been out of reach.

### Creation Care

Anyone who has travelled in Central America has seen garbage and pollution like we rarely see in Canada. At home, on the street or from a moving vehicle, people toss their garbage. There are many signs of creation groaning but the presence of garbage is one of the most notable.

In eastern El Salvador, we participated in a workshop (first in a series of 4) on the Biblical basis for **Caring for Creation**, which brought together leaders from eight churches. We traveled with the president of ABES, Dr. Hugo and his wife Dr. Norah, who after working a full week, picked us up on a Saturday at 4:30am to arrive in Ciudad Barrios for a 9am workshop, with the day ending back in the city at 7pm! One pastor shared, "We are taught to preach, pray, evangelize and baptize but few of us are concerned about caring for God's creation." CBM supports this training which provides a biblical basis for caring for creation, raises awareness and leads to actions that people can take as a family, church, and community to play their part as stewards of creation.

### Prayer and gratitude:

- For peaceful resolution of political tensions and transition to the new government in Guatemala.
- CBM Partners and their leaders as they navigate a challenging environment El Salvador, being salt and light
- Cuba Pastors Retreat - a time of encouragement and deeper understanding of Pastor Mentoring through our colleagues Bill & Janice Dyck.
- SENT experiences in El Salvador will have impact in participating Canadian churches, Hillside & Rivercross as they engage in Global Mission and local initiatives in their own community
- Safe travels, for us and family members joining together in Halifax as we celebrate Kathleen's mother's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in November.

**Bruno** [bsoucy@cbmin.org](mailto:bsoucy@cbmin.org) [soucy.bruno@gmail.com](mailto:soucy.bruno@gmail.com)

**Kathleen** [ksoucy@cbmin.org](mailto:ksoucy@cbmin.org) [soucy.kathleen@gmail.com](mailto:soucy.kathleen@gmail.com)