



**SBSC Support Provides Unexpected Educational Benefits!**

SBSC funded two projects in the Bajo Lempa region of El Salvador earlier this year that provide educational benefits to Salvadoran students. One of the projects funded infrastructure improvement to the kindergarten through grade 9 school on the Isla de Montecristo. The other project was a three-day skills-building course for the 29 educators who staff the five pre-school education centers in the Bajo Lempa. The projects accomplished the expressed goals of a more functional and comfortable school facility in Montecristo as well as a more skilled and effective teaching staff at the pre-school education centers, respectively. But they did more as well!



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**Covid Slashes Our Funding!**

One difficult thing we've been forced to adapt to this Covid season is living with uncertainty. It intrudes into all our planning, expectations, and daily assumptions. Our poisonous politics, the weekly "breaking news" of endless hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and atrocities committed by humans against refugees and desperately poor staggers our imaginations.

Daily we are bombarded by voluminous emails, TV, and mail appeals to respond with compassion. Added to these are the incessant cries to support political candidates and causes of all kinds.

So, when the virus continues to remind us it is very much in charge worldwide, we chafe with frustration and denial.

While not surprising this uncertainty and these competing needs have caused our financial support to drop sharply. We've had to scale back projects that we have enabled in El Salvador. Now we face having to reduce our support for our Salvadoran partners, Voices on the Border, and sponsorship of more refugees locally.

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**YOU ARE INVITED!**

**RECONNECT** with El Salvador and each other  
**RENEW** your much needed financial support.

**VIRTUAL PROGRAM AND FUNDRAISER**

Sat. Nov 20, 4-5PM

Executive Director Jose Acosta reports from El Salvador  
Scenes and music from El Salvador  
Breakout rooms

Get a Zoom link: email us with subject line 'RECONNECT' at [contactsouthbaysanctuary@gmail.com](mailto:contactsouthbaysanctuary@gmail.com)

Donate using Paypal or a credit card on the web at [www.southbaysanctuarycovenant.weebly.com](http://www.southbaysanctuarycovenant.weebly.com)

Write checks to: "Univ Lutheran/SBSC"  
Mail to: SBSC c/o St. Thomas Aquinas Parish Office  
3290 Middlefield Road  
Palo Alto, California 94306

**Requested minimum donation \$20**  
**Please donate when registering for the Program!**  
**No one turned away for lack of funds**

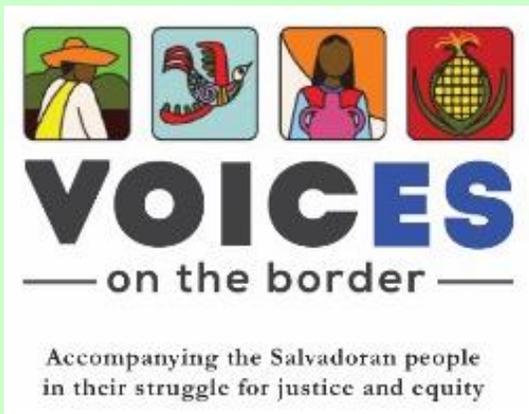
## Voices on the Border and South Bay Sanctuary Covenant

Voices on the Border (VOTB) is an essential partner for South Bay Sanctuary Covenant (SBSC)--without them none of our work in El Salvador would be possible.

We have been working together for many years. Our first contact occurred in 1988, when a courageous group from SBSC visited El Salvador while the Civil War was still going on. They went because Salvadoran refugees here had requested that they do so. Their hope was that a first-hand report by Americans on the real situation in El Salvador would be believed, since no one was listening to the voices of the refugees themselves.

One of the places the SBSC delegation visited was the refugee camp in Colomoncagua, Honduras. Many internationals were volunteering in the refugee camps, and among them were the founders of VOTB.

VOTB accompanied the refugees as they returned to El Salvador in 1989 and began building new communities. Because there wasn't enough productive land in the mountains, some people relocated to the coastal region of the Lower Lempa River after the Peace Accords were signed in 1992. They founded two new communities, one of which was Comunidad Octavio Ortiz, named after one of the many priests murdered by the government for advocating for the poor.



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## Current Project: Helping Disabled Veterans Defend their Rights

Many of our Salvadoran friends who fought in the Civil War (1980-1992) sustained lasting injuries that continue to affect their lives. After the war, groups of veterans organized to demand compensation from the government.



The Association of War-Wounded (ALGES, for its initials in Spanish) is the largest group of disabled and war-wounded in the country that continues to fight for their rights. They have done so for decades through many different governments. Their successes include the gradual increase in pensions, improvements in health care, housing programs, and scholarship programs for the sons and daughters of war disabled.

Under the current government of Pres. Nayib Bukele, pension payments have been delayed, and health care has deteriorated, leading to a growing concern that their hard-earned rights are endangered.

Leaders of ALGES in the department of Morazán met to discuss how best to respond to this threat. They approached Voices on the Border (VOTB) to request funding to strengthen their organization and mobilize their membership. VOTB, in turn, asked SBSC if it would consider a donation for this cause. The SBSC Steering Committee agreed to give \$1500 for the project which includes:

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- A training program on political organization and advocacy, aimed at 32 leaders from 16 municipal boards of Morazán.
- Organizing four regional assemblies to analyze the situation and identify strategies to defend the rights of war-disabled people.

*Karen Skold*

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In 1994, VOTB contacted SBSC and asked if we would accompany this new community because it had good leadership, was well-organized, and had great needs. Comunidad Octavio Ortiz has been our partner community ever since, and we have sent delegations to visit them every year since then, until the pandemic made that impossible.

How does VOTB help us carry out our work? They act as our liaisons with our partner community, manage the funds we send, for projects, and present proposals for our consideration. They lead our annual delegations to El Salvador, plan our itineraries based on our interests, and arrange food, lodging, transportation, and translation at a reasonable cost. Past and present Voices directors have traveled here from El Salvador to give first-hand reports at our fundraisers on what is happening in the country and in the communities they serve.

The organization has two staff members in El Salvador, Jose Acosta, Executive Director, and Ebony Pleasants, Program Director, and a volunteer Board based in the US. They are entirely funded by contributions from individuals and groups who support their mission, "accompanying the Salvadoran people in their struggle for justice and equity". We help support them with our contributions.

Visit Voices' website at  
<https://voiceselsalvador.wordpress.com/>

*Karen Skold*

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SBSC's financial support for these projects has provided additional, unexpected-- but perhaps equally or even more important--benefits. In the case of the Montecristo school, the infrastructure improvements have increased community and parental involvement in the students' education and motivated parents to attend three workshops on the important role of parents in their children's education.



As to the skills building course for the pre-school educators, the educators were energized after the course to ask Voices to provide similar courses in the future. In addition, the educators requested a meeting with the First Lady of El Salvador to ask for more government support of pre-school education in the Bajo Lempa, especially for more teaching resources and an increase to their very low salaries. Again, Voices on the Border stepped in to help, writing a letter on the educators' behalf that was delivered to the First Lady.

As these projects illustrate, Voices on the Border and SBSC, along with their Salvadoran partners, prioritize projects to improve education in the Bajo Lempa. With the advice and guidance of the Voices' staff in El Salvador, SBSC has played a critical role in this effort. In addition to the financial support for these two projects, SBSC has provided other educational support in the Bajo Lempa over the years, including donations of schoolbooks and computers, funding a transportation program so students can go safely to and from their schools, and providing financial support for infrastructure improvements at a preschool education center.

*Mark Reedy*

## **SBSC Continues Accompaniment to Salvadoran Family Seeking Asylum**

As you may know from our previous newsletters, SBSC is providing accompaniment to a family from El Salvador who fled threats by violent gangs. The family is applying for asylum in the U.S., fearing persecution or death if returned to El Salvador. (The names of the family members below have been changed for their confidentiality.)

The young father Alberto fled to the U.S. in 2015 after threats on his life by gangs in El Salvador. After a perilous journey across Mexico, Alberto was apprehended by the Border Patrol and held in a detention center for several months. SBSC and Voices on the Border held a Go Fund Me fundraiser that was successful enough to hire an attorney to secure Alberto's release on bond and then fly him to California.

After Alberto's partner (and now wife) Carolina and their young child Josefa witnessed the murder of a close family member in 2016, they also fled El Salvador to be with Alberto in the U.S. But when they were detained at the U.S. border, they were placed in a frigid detention center, which left Josefa with severe pneumonia. With SBSC funding, the mother and daughter were flown to California, where Josefa was immediately taken to a hospital. She was treated for pneumonia for 10 days before she recovered and was discharged.

With the arrival of Carolina and Josefa, Alberto, who had been living with an SBSC supporter for a year and a half, reunited with them and the family found rental housing in East Palo Alto. They currently rent an apartment in Redwood City. Both parents are working at full-time jobs, Alberto in apartment maintenance and Carolina in janitorial work. Josefa is in elementary school. Carolina's younger sister Maya, who was successful in her own asylum case, came from Georgia to live with them earlier this year. She attends high school in Redwood City.

Your donations have provided critical funding to pay the legal fees in the family's asylum case. SBSC funds have also been used for visits with a trauma counseling specialist after the harrowing events in El

Salvador. In addition, SBSC provided emergency funds last summer to help with rent and basic necessities when Alberto and Carolina were unable to work after contracting Covid-19. Along with financial support, SBSC has provided transportation and accompaniment where needed at case preparation meetings with attorneys and counseling sessions with the trauma specialist.

After earlier postponements, the family's asylum case will be heard in immigration court in September of next year. Your continued financial support and prayers are much appreciated by the family.

*Mark Reedy*

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But we don't bemoan what this means for us as a 40-year-old volunteer institution: instead, we agonize for the families and individuals who struggle for survival and hope. The basic assumption is that to stem the flow of refugees from Central America, they must develop beyond marginal survival and see better conditions where they live! Our past funding has made a huge difference.

SBSC makes this appeal to YOU, whether you are a person with Salvadoran roots, have been on an SBSC delegation to El Salvador, have friends there, or simply believe in our work of solidarity and accompaniment with our Salvadoran partners. Time and again, you have demonstrated that YOU UNDERSTAND AND TRULY CARE!

Your financial support is critical for SBSC to continue our work without significant cutbacks at this very challenging time. Please respond generously.

*Dale Bracey*

**Donate to SBSC with Paypal or a credit card at**  
[www.southbaysanctuarycovenant.weebly.com](http://www.southbaysanctuarycovenant.weebly.com)

**or**

Write checks to: "Univ Lutheran/SBSC"  
Mail to: SBSC c/o St. Thomas Aquinas Parish Office  
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Palo Alto, California 94306