

# Mission Trip to El Salvador

## “A Life Changing Experience”

### Millis Church of Christ Lends A Hand In El Salvador

“A life changing experience” is how members of the Millis Church of Christ Congregational (UCC) describe their October mission trip to El Salvador to help Habitat for Humanity build homes for low-income families.

Partnering with seven members of the United Church of Christ in Norwell, 12 members of the Millis Church of Christ traveled to El Salvador on October 6<sup>th</sup> to spend eight days learning and helping in a country filled with challenges.



Flying into rainy San Salvador through Miami, we linked up with local Habitat staff and settled into a local hotel. Before leaving San Salvador to travel to Santa Ana, we joined thousands of Salvadorans visiting the tomb of revered archbishop Oscar Romero who was assassinated while saying mass in 1980 and who was about to be canonized by the Catholic Church. The sight of fellow Christians weeping openly at the tomb of a man of peace was deeply touching and a fitting beginning to a journey into the homes and lives of a warm, welcoming people.



Santa Ana is a gritty and bustling provincial city and the headquarters of Habitat’s provincial offices. The goal for the week was to work on two home sites in the town of Candelaria de la Frontera, 40 minutes away near the Guatemalan border, alongside local masons and workers.

The families who would occupy the home contribute land and labor and take out a low-interest mortgage for up to 15 years through Habitat. The families therefore have a stake and sense of ownership and responsibility for their new home.



Heavy rains the first three days delayed the start of work, but we spent the time getting to know the Salvadoran people better: visiting residents of a home for destitute senior citizens; touring an after-school center for children; sorting eyeglasses for an organization that provides rural health care. We also learned of the ravages of the country's civil war, the on-going efforts of reconciliation, and the scourge of the gangs that constantly threaten people's lives and businesses and lead many to flee to the United States.

Finally, we dove into the work on the houses in the beautiful town of Candelaria de la Frontera. There was work for everyone – moving dirt, digging trenches, mixing and hauling cement, sifting sand, tying rebar together, and moving hundreds of cinder blocks. Not a single power tool at either site. Hard and hot work but done with joy and energy in the spirit of giving. The future occupants of one home – a couple with three small children – lived next door with the grandmother and other members of the family in a small two-bedroom house part of which was used as a small grocery store. Clearly, the new home, although only 450 square feet, would make an enormous difference to this family.

The days passed too quickly and too soon it was time to head home. Leaving was bittersweet for all of us, having built strong relationships. Our feeling was unanimous, though: “we have to go back and do it again.”

