



Global Awareness Through Experience

GATE Update



EIGHTH ISSUE

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Fostering a Spirituality of Solidarity

Co-Madre Alicia Garcia: Presente!

Co-Madre Founder passes away, leaves legacy of hope

By Marie Des Jarlais, FSPA

Once in a while, on this journey through life, one meets a quiet yet exceptional person. Alicia Garcia was one of those people.

You can read (below) of her simple origins, but something in her soul led her to an extraordinary life.

Alicia pursued her dream for enough education so that she could work at the maternity hospital in San Salvador. During one of the student protests against the government, it was Alicia who opened the



Alicia Garcia

doors of the maternity hospital as a place of refuge for the students. This humble woman was the last of the founding Co-Madres. A source of hope for Alicia and the Co-Madres was the reception of the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award. She and another Co-Madre received this award in Washington, D.C.

Greatness does not come from what we have, but with what we do with our gifts. Alicia and the Co-Madres were recognized for their tireless work for human rights in not only El Salvador but throughout Latin America, as members of the Federation of Mothers of the "Disappeared." The Co-Madres (Alicia) were instrumental in petitioning the United Nations to sponsor a resolution against forced disappearances throughout the world, making it a crime against humanity. Alicia spoke to a U.N. committee, and brought with her the 3 volumes of black and white photos which documented the worst of the abuses during the civil war. To their credit, the Co-Madre's efforts were rewarded with the passage of the U.N. resolution.

While Alicia did not have much formal education, she was an eloquent speaker

who always spoke from her heart and her experience. Those of you who have been to El Salvador and met Alicia will never forget her heart-felt testimony of her personal experience and torture at the hands of U.S.-trained Salvadoran torturers. Her testimony provided a forum for the "faceless victims," most of whom did not survive such vicious torture.

I would like to extend my gratitude to a very generous donor who provided funds to cover Alicia's medicine and brief hospital stay during her final few weeks of life. This generosity provided the opportunity for Alicia to transition from this world to the next. Alicia's family will forever be grateful for this generosity.

The tireless work of the Co-Madres continues. Patricia has become the selected director. Their work is bearing fruit in that they have been meeting with current government officials who support their efforts for some kind of remuneration for the victims of torture and other abuse. Where this

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leads remains to be seen. Human rights educational workshops are planned for around the country in 2011. Latin Americans are experts at organizing people. May their efforts bear fruit so that justice may become a reality.

By Blanca Garcia of the Co-Madres

Emelina Panameño de Garcia was born in Santa Maria Ostuma, Department of La Paz, El Salvador, on March 26, 1942. She was born to Maria Elena Mena and Daniel



Alicia at the Wall of Remembrance.

Panameño. Since her birth she was called Alicia by her maternal grandmother because that was the name she wanted for her granddaughter. Alicia was the name everyone knew her by even though she was baptized as Emelina Panameño Mena. Alicia began suffering abuse and neglect when she was 3 years old. Her mother abandoned her one morning around 3:00 a.m. That morning, her mother sat her at the end of the bed and asked her to sit there while she was going to the bathroom. They were staying at her grandparents' house. When Alicia started to cry because her mother did not come back, it was her grandmother who came to the bedroom and comforted her. Alicia's mother never returned.

After that her aunts and uncles started to abuse her by bullying her; they pulled her hair, pinched her, and made her do work for them around the house. Refusal to do as she was told resulted in being hit or kicked. All of that was done when the

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2010 GATE Charitable Giving Creates Momentum:

We are so very grateful to each and every donor for the difference that you are making in the lives of families and communities in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Venezuela. May the following progress listing lift your heart and spirit, knowing that you are a contributor to the improvement of life and health for our friends and neighbors to the South. Please know the recipients send their deepest gratitude to you, the donors. They would like to thank each of you, personally, for your generosity. Never doubt that your gift helps to change the world!



BAKERY:

The village of San Miguelito is home to farmers and their families. Across the road from a soccer field is where the women's bakery was started. Since there were no empty buildings, the bakery began in the hallway of a home. Initially your donations bought a used double oven, large baking trays, and baking supplies needed to start the project. The flour company provided training for the women to make bread, rolls, cookies, and pizza. The 12 women bake in the mornings, and then walk to sell their wares in the immediate neighborhood.

The desire to expand both their bakery as well as their sales area has grown. Again, through your donations, the women were able to purchase land from the owner, adjacent to the house where the bakery now operates. The dream is to have a free standing bakery with enough counter space and screens to increase daily production capacity. The building would be a cement block structure. Total cost is \$14,500.



SCHOLARSHIPS:

Through your generosity, we have been able to send scholarships to 6 rural Salvadoran youth. Three are still in grade school, and three are in high school. One of these youth wants to become a pediatrician, another a journalist, another a human rights lawyer. What promise!

In Mexico 3 rural youth are able to continue with their studies. A young woman is studying to be a Sustainable Agriculture Engineer. A young man is studying to become an architect, and the third student is still in high school. \$620 a semester provides the funds for the two university-level students. The high school student receives \$500 a semester.

A generous donor has fulfilled a promise to send scholarship funds for Maria, in Chiapas, to earn a university degree in accounting. Maria will finish her studies in late June, 2011. Although young, Maria is the last living member of her family. Without the support of this generous sponsor, she never would have had this opportunity for study.

A single mother in Mexico City is trying to finish her high school education so that she can progress to the university level. This mother has 3 children who are also in school. \$900 a semester provides the funding for all of them to continue with their studies.

This is the second year that a family of 3 sisters in Guatemala, with 4 children among them, is receiving scholarship assistance. Although education is theoretically "free" in Guatemala, the extra costs of shoes, books,



WATER PROJECTS:

Engineer and healer Sergio Castro has finished the Las Minas, Chiapas water project. Located in the Highlands of Chiapas, 65 families now have access to clean water.

The next water project will be in Cruz Obispo, approximately 50 minutes from San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas. Here, 70 families await water. The cost for this project is \$5,900.

The second water project is located in La Puerta, Department of Sonsonate, El Salvador. Through your generosity, the drilling through rock has been finished and capped. In late December 2010, a small shed will be built to house the water pump. In early January 2011 the pump will be bought and installed, along with the electrical work.

The next step will be the construction of a large water tank for the 300 families. The total cost is \$16,000, of which we now need the final \$9,500. After the water tank is constructed, the last phase will be the pipes to the houses.



"CHERIE'S KIDS" YOUTH PROGRAM:

Carlos Garcia offers 5 weekend workshops a year for youth from mainly rural areas. The weekends host between 45-60 youth. Added are visits to each municipality where the youth live, to have an accurate idea of living conditions and social reality. Phase 2 has begun, that is, the youth are responsible now to return to their villages, and "recruit" other youth to join them. The original older youth become mentors for younger members to learn leadership skills. This process of youth empowering their younger neighbors has proven successful in keeping young adults from joining gangs and using drugs, to becoming viable leaders in their villages and towns. We are proud of the work that Carlos is doing in empowering these young men and women. \$1,600 covers all weekend expenses for each workshop: public bus fare, simple food, a book per person and educational materials.

GATE...

WELCOMES people of all faith traditions.

STANDS in solidarity with the global community.

SHOWS life through the eyes of the working poor, women's groups and grassroots communities.

OFFERS insight into the implications of global economics and politics.

INTEGRATES each day's experience with dialogue and reflection.

DRAWS on its 30 years of experience to offer opportunities that speak to the soul...that can change one's life.

!Cuba: Esperamos!

GATE continues to hope that the embargo against travel for U.S. citizens to Cuba will be dropped.

We eagerly await the day when we can dialogue with our Cuban friends and learn first hand of their reality and challenges.

These are historic days as the Cuban government relaxes some restrictions to enable Cubans to start small businesses.

If and when there are any changes, GATE will send out an e-mail announcement to advise you of program opportunities.



school supplies and daily bus fare adds up. Without your support, these children would have to drop out of school.



SHEEP:

A group of FSPA affiliates who participated in the Franciscan Pilgrimage Retreat to Mexico a couple of years ago started the Share a Sheep project. The request from rural, single mothers (husbands are elsewhere working) for a small flock of sheep to help sustain their families spurred this project. So far, 3 flocks of sheep have been donated to families. Along with the sheep, the families are given training on how to care for the animals. They receive materials to build a small shelter for the sheep, animal food, as well as food and water troughs. \$2,000 provides for 6-7 sheep and all of the listed materials.

News from the Cancun Climate Summit

UNORCA (National Regional Organization of Farmers) and Women for Dialogue, among many other groups, have sponsored caravans of Mexican indigenous people to be present at the summit. They join other indigenous representatives from Central and South America in Cancun.

The cosmology of the indigenous has been one of respect and care for Mother Earth. Whether it is NAFTA, the dumping of corn into Mexico, the threat of transnational corporations with their mega farming, indigenous leaders are speaking out on behalf of other forms of farming. Recent floods and mudslides in Mexico, especially the Gulf Coast States, has raised the alarm for a change in policy.

These representatives sleep on the floors of social halls or wherever they can find lodging. They bring an important voice and alternative experience to care for the earth. May their voices be heard!

2011 GATE SCHEDULE

Venezuela...February 19-March 1, 2011
 El Salvador.....March 19-28, 2011
 Guatemala (Holy Week)...April 13-23, 2011
 El Salvador.....May 18-28, 2011
 Guatemala.....June 30-July 10, 2011
 El Salvador.....July 12-21, 2011
 Mexico.....August 8-12, 2011

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Alicia Garcia

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grandparents were not around since they were very loving and caring people.

By the time she was 7, Alicia was forced to work because her grandparents were extremely poor. She started by helping people to husk corn. She would work from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and was paid \$3.75 per week. She began to save money to buy fabric to make herself a new dress. With her old dresses she made underwear. She also took care of the cows, planted corn and other crops, and did household chores.

When she was 14, she decided to go to San Salvador to study and work. Her dream was to be a physician. But Alicia had only finished 3rd grade, and was only able to enter the nursing school with the help of some priests from the church in Colonia Centro America. She lived and worked at the church. There she would cook for the priests and do other chores. It was here where she met the man she married when she was 15. She continued to study, graduated from nursing school, and eventually found a job at the maternity hospital. While working there she noticed many doctors and nurses mistreated their patients and abused other members of the staff. She realized these were poor and defenseless people just like herself and many were her co-workers. Alicia then decided to help the patients and co-workers so that at inspection time the people usually at a disadvantage would not suffer humiliation, scolding, or other forms of punishment.

In 1973 she became aware that there were organizations fighting for worker's rights. On July 30, 1974, there was a massacre followed by a student march protesting the "disappearance" of many young people. Alicia got involved in the search for the missing or others who were unjustly jailed. She joined other mothers in their plea for the freedom of those jailed. Alicia and the other mothers wanted to visit the prisoners but were not allowed inside the jails.

During one of their attempted visits, standing outside of the jail, they met a priest named Oscar Romero. They asked him to deliver a letter to a young man called Gabriel. Gabriel had been jailed and was the victim of horrendous torture, and needed pain medication. Father Romero became the channel for the mothers to have food and medicine brought inside of the jail. This group of mothers began to meet with other women in secret to help each other find loved ones taken by the military. The women were never told where their loved ones were taken.

At the beginning there were only 7 women in this group, but by 1975 many others joined them, and together they would ask Oscar Romero for help. When he became aware of the multitude of cases of detained, "disappeared," and assassinated, Romero invited the women over for a meal and encouraged them to organize a "Committee of Mothers." It was in this way that in 1977 they formed the Committee of Mothers and Family Members of the Detained, "Disappeared," Assassinated, and Political Prisoners of El Salvador, since known as the Co-Madres. Romero offered

them support by publically denouncing the human rights abuses during his Sunday homily. The Press Corp was present at these Masses, and Salvadorans listened to the homilies on their radios throughout the country. Twenty five women went to the seminary for dinner with Romero. Of the 25 women, 12 were named to the founder's committee.

During these years the government violence and cruelty continued to increase, but this gave the Co-Madres even more determination to denounce the oppression suffered by those captured and killed. The Co-Madres played a significant role during the civil war in El Salvador.

After a struggle with cancer, Alicia died on August 11, 2010, during a short stay at Hospital Rosales. At the time of her death, Alicia was president of the Latin American Federation of Associations of Relatives of the Detained and Disappeared (FEDEFAM). She was also the director of the Committee of Mothers and Relatives of the Detained, Disappeared, Assassinated and Political Prisoners of El Salvador Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero (Co-Madres). Furthermore, she was an active participant in current efforts such as the research and construction of the Wall of Memory in Parque Cuscatlan, dedicated to the memory of victims of the civil wars, and the effort to preserve the historic memory for the country.

The original document was in Spanish, from Blanca, Alicia's daughter. Our gratitude to Maribel Bird, Ph.D., of Viterbo University, for her translation.



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GATE Cultural Immersion Programs 2011



El Salvador

March 19-28, 2011
 May 18-28, 2011
 July 12-21, 2011

Guatemala

April 13-23, 2011 (Holy Week)
 June 30-July 10, 2011

Call for Information on:

Venezuela • Oaxaca, Mexico
 • Eastern Europe • Mexico
 and Chiapas

Please check the **GATE** web site for additional programs that may not be listed as of this printing: www.GATE-Travel.org

Prices subject to change. All trips require a registration fee to reserve your space. If sent four months prior to opening date, registration is \$100. Later is \$150. Program fee covers cost of all meals (except one), event fees and transportation within the country for Latin America and the cost of two meals, event fees and transportation within the country for European trips. Plane fare to opening site not included nor taxi fare to airport for your return home.

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