COVID–9 AND CIS EL SALVADOR UPDATE

San Salvador, April 1, 2020

Dear Friends,

We want to give you an update on the impact of COVID–19 in El Salvador, including on our CIS communities and our work.

The Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele has taken extraordinary measures to prevent the spread of the virus. Although there have been some mistakes made along the way, the measures have slowed the spread of the virus. The first death was reported on March 31 and today there are 32 cases—which has effectively lowered the curve in El Salvador. Twenty-nine of those have been in controlled quarantine since they returned to the country and three are locally transmitted cases. Still we are and preparing for the worst and looking at how to continue solidarity work. To date, seven Salvadorans have passed away outside of the country and one inside due to the virus. Please see the attached timeline for more details about these governmental actions and their effect on the people of El Salvador and up-to-date information at https://covid19.gob.sv.

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITIES AND CIS PROGRAMS.

Obviously, the speed and manner in which the virus has traveled has affected all countries and peoples of the world, reminding us that we are all one family and there is only one Planet Earth, which we must protect for future generations. The virus affects rich and poor alike and does not discriminate based on nationality, religion, gender, or the color of your skin. Although El Salvador has been spared some suffering to date due to the extensive measures, the impact is palpable. The further out communities—the poorest—are most affected, as closer to the city markets are open and public transportation continues. Here are reports from some of our communities:

Many mothers and fathers are without work. Many people on the island who work to extract shellfish as their only means of income are now without work. The coconut cooperative stopped its operations and stopped paying salaries. The boat drivers are without work since no one leaves the island. It is also difficult for us to get food, because you must go to the mainland to purchase necessities. There is a limitation of the food you can find on the island.

Isla El Espíritu Santo, Puerto el Triunfo, Usulután

Most of the providers to our local stores have stopped their work, so we can’t purchase our basic food basket here in the community, and many of our families live day to day—cannot afford the transport to Ilobasco and to purchase a week’s worth of food. Public transportation to our village has stopped, and the private trucks that help with transport are limited to only carrying 12 passengers because of health measures. The women’s businesses—bakery and cheese factory have severely limited their work...
because there are not providers for the inputs, they can only do home deliveries, and they fear they can catch the virus by attending to the public.

Llano Largo, Jutiapa, Cabañas

University classes continue online. Nonetheless, it is not the same quality and some of our professors are not well trained in giving classes online. If we don’t understand something, it is difficult to get an explanation. Additionally, some of us do not have access to internet in our communities, and those of us who do have to pay expensive packages since we do not have an 18-month contract. Transportation is more limited to be able to go into the center to do our homework. Some of us are afraid we may not pass the semester for these reasons.

Scholarship Students Suchitoto Communities, Cuscatlán

Studies are complicated because not everyone has access to internet, smart phones, or computers where they can receive their classes in an understandable way. Everyone is crowded in a small space, and it leads to arguments in the families. Youth are not motivated to do their homework in this manner. The parents don’t have patience or knowledge to help with homework. We have set up a Facebook group to motivate the students and help out.

Families have lost income from work and remittances. We are surviving on the local fruits in season: cashew fruit, mangos, jocotes, bananas, and pitos.

Angie, a Scholarship student who is studying medicine, is giving workshops on how to prevent the COVID-19, how it spreads, and the needs for the stay-at-home measures.

Tonacatepeque, San Salvador

Delegations

Four delegations between March and May have been suspended. We suspect there will be few if any delegations for the rest of the year, though CIS will try to maintain a delegation programmed from November 27th to December 4th to honor the 40th anniversary of the four U.S. religious women who gave their lives for working with the poor in El Salvador.

Delegations are the heart of people-to-people relationships. Their absence creates a ripple effect of lessening support for scholarship programs, Salvadoran artisans, Clean Water programs, because actually seeing the reality and the impact firsthand is a major motivator for people to donate to these programs. Additionally, the loss of the visit impacts the local economy and support for CIS staff.

Spanish and English Schools

Our in-house Spanish classes have shut down due to the quarantine and the fact that travelers cannot get here. Similarly, this has the same ripple effect as the loss of visits from delegations.

The next English cycle scheduled to start this week, also had to be shut down, both due to both the lack of volunteer teachers and the prohibition to having in-person classes at this time.

We are expanding our online Spanish school and starting an online English school for the first time. If these are successful, we will be able to keep our schools open.

CIS Scholarship and Leadership Development Program

Presential classes have been shut down. Homework assignments are given, and most university classes are online. Since CIS and our partner scholarship programs prioritize communities and families with economic necessity, the students have asked us to continue monthly payments during this time. Even though expenses may be less by saving on transport, the students have told us they have lost their family income because of the obligatory quarantine in the country. Many have not appeared on the list for the $300 government subsidy, though the CIS is offering technical support and follow up to help families who qualify to get the subsidy. The students in grade school also lose their daily snack or lunch and so it is
an additional expense for the family, and many do not have access to internet to do homework and so must pay for that service.

We ask you to continue to give to your local parish, church, foundation, or community group to make sure the program is financially sound. Help give youth the tools to get out of poverty and develop leadership skills to build an environmentally and economically sustainable future.

CIS Clean Water and Environment Program
CIS is limited to being able to go out to the countryside with the stay-at-home order. Additionally, one of the delegations that was cancelled was scheduled to bring in 150 water filters. Nevertheless, we have an immediate demand for 250 filters.

Clean water is one of the biggest health risks to Salvadorans who suffer from water-born illnesses that can lead to death. Additionally, some communities do not even have running water, when one of the key measures to preventing the spread of COVID-19 is to constantly wash your hands. CIS has not only provided homes and schools with water filters and purifiers; we have contributed to 5 communities securing running water through this program.

Dignified Housing in Paso Puente Community
As many of you know, CIS is in the middle of building dignified homes in Paso Puente Community in conjunction with the Salvador Government and with support from Homes for the Heart and other individuals and foundations. We are happy to report 30 homes have been completed and those families are now living in dignified homes. We are in the middle of building 20 more homes. We respect and support the health measures that have been taken by the government. We are going to request special permission to finish these homes so the families can have a roof over their heads before or shortly into the rainy season starts on May 1st.

There are another 50 families in Paso Puente that live in deplorable conditions on a waiting list to get approval for the government subsidy. CIS, in partnership with Homes from the Heart, will continue to solicit funds for dignified homes—which contribute to a healthy family, as these homes are not getting rain, mold, or dust inside, and they are secure. Right now, many families do not even have a house to go into to maintain quarantine.

Women’s Businesses and Solidarity Crafts
Small businesses are suffering in this period as mentioned in the testimonies above. Some of the women qualify for the subsidy, and others have not appeared on the list. The businesses that have become legal may not qualify. CIS is also providing assistance to make sure households that qualify are included. The food business is operating at about 30% of their normal capacity. The sewing cooperative Pajaro Flor is using the time to make face masks. Agricultural work is not limited, so Jiquilite women are preparing to plant new indigo seeds. Unfortunately, the indigo cooperative in San Isidro had to shut down because of the distance they have to travel to go to their plot of land and they feel insecure.

Ways you can help CIS solidarity work and community health and sustainability.
CIS has decided not to give emergency aid at this time, due to the fact that the government is distributing basic food baskets to communities in need as well as the $300. Instead, our work will address helping people access the $300 so they can purchase their own food. Additionally, the logistics and permits for providing emergency aid would be difficult at this time. We may decide otherwise depending on how the situation develops.

However, we do want to reinforce our programs which better help the families and CIS to be sustainable. Our priorities will be to reinforce and grow those programs and deepen awareness around health and the environment.
1. **Sign up for online Spanish classes. Are you homeschooling? Volunteer to teach English classes online.** Children and adults alike can sign up for online classes, either one-on-one or up to three children from the same family if they are at similar levels of Spanish. This will help keep teachers employed and help the CIS keep its doors open during this period. You can take advantage of idle time by improving your Spanish skills and learn about the situation in El Salvador at the same time. Likewise, our English students for the first time are getting classes online and you can volunteer teach from anywhere if you have teaching skills and internet.

2. **Donate to CIS Clean Water and Environment Program or bring filters in your next visit to El Salvador.** $75 will provide a family with clean drinking water for eight years, as well as training on health, hygiene, and the environment. We also desperately need people to bring us the filters, so when travel is safe, if you are coming to El Salvador, please contact CIS so we can arrange for you to bring some filters. We will pay the extra luggage fees. (About 60 filters fit in a check in suitcase and weigh almost nothing.)

3. **Support CIS online networking and technical capacity.** We need to purchase some additional laptops for staff and scholarship committees to work from home. This will also help us to maintain staff to support the families to access government subsidies. We are also working with the Master’s Program of Business Administration at the University of Maryland to strengthen our online networking; this will help us compensate for limited people-to-people exchanges during the year as well as build our on-line programs to be more self-sufficient and support CIS solidarity work.

4. **Build a dignified home, so families will have somewhere to do their quarantine and stay healthy with a roof over their head.** In Paso Puente Community, we are finishing 50 homes, plus 15 bathrooms. There are 50 more families waiting to be approved by the government subsidy. The Government contributes $3,500 per home plus infrastructure, and CIS and Homes from the Heart raise $4,000 per home. We want to go ahead and continue fundraising for the families who are waiting.

5. **Continue to support the CIS scholarship program through your local church, foundation, or community group or through General CIS Scholarship Fund.** If you are not part of a program, you can donate to CIS through the general scholarship fund so we can complement the existing programs and sustain programs without partnerships. This scholarship program is building leadership and empowerment for a sustainable El Salvador. In addition, in times of crisis, this monthly subsidy is helping families survive.

Write us at info@cis-elsalvador for more information.

- Donations can be sent to LOS OLIVOS CIS / PO BOX 76 / WESTMONT, IL 60559.
- Please specify if you would like your donation designated to a specific program listed above or note general support during COVID19.

We thank you for your solidarity and steady support. We know that you are affected as well and perhaps are providing support to those who need it in your own communities. We are grateful for any additional support you can provide to CIS communities.

In Solidarity,

Leslie Schuld, for the CIS in El Salvador and our U.S. 501c3, Los Olivos CIS.
Timeline COVID-19 El Salvador

El Salvador became aware of the situation in January and paid attention because there were Salvadoran students on scholarship studying in China and three specifically in Wuhan Province. By January 31st, El Salvador suspended travelers incoming from China and worked on repatriating the Salvadoran youth. On February 19th the students were flown to Ukraine and placed in quarantine and then later repatriated to El Salvador and placed in quarantine again.

On March 9th President Bukele ordered further restrictions for incoming travelers from China, South Korea, Italy, France, Iran, and Germany; all this before there were any reported cases in El Salvador.

On March 11th, the World Health Organization declared the virus a pandemic. The same evening, President Bukele ordered a mandatory 30-day controlled quarantine for all incoming passengers by air, land, or sea. Either that, or return on the flight they came in on! This caught passengers by surprise, as neither they nor the airlines had been notified of the restriction before boarding the plane. All subsequent incoming passengers were subject to the same restrictions for the next week. Then, on March 18th, the President closed the Salvadoran airport to all incoming commercial passenger flights. Further measures were taken to close “blind spots” on the border where people were paying coyotes to sneak in. Since March 18th only Salvadoran citizens or permanent residents can enter the country. Since March 11, all public and private schools have been ordered closed and teachers asked to give home assignments to k-12 students and universities asked to continue classes online.

On March 14th, people were asked to further limit their mobilization and do their work from home. People over 60 years old and with pre-existing conditions were asked to stay home completely; their employers were asked to cover their salaries.

One week, later on March 21st, people were told to return home and return from the beach or where they were—that this was not a vacation but a quarantine, and mobility restrictions would be imposed, so they should return home immediately. That evening, the President and his cabinet held a press conference declaring an obligatory home quarantine and that only sectors deemed essential could continue working; these include food cultivation, production and delivery, health and pharmaceuticals, and finance or banking. Other movements deemed essential, including going to the bank, grocery stores or markets, accessing healthcare and pharmaceuticals, and using public transportation are permitted—but only for one family member, carrying a letter designating that family member. Parks and malls were also closed to prevent gatherings.

The first case of COVID-19 was confirmed on March 18th. On the date of writing this, there are 32 positive cases. Of these, 28 have been in controlled quarantine and are people who entered from abroad. One of these entered through a blind spot and resides in the municipality of Metapán in Santa Ana; he moved about for two weeks before testing positive. Three cases testing positive were not what are called “imported cases”: there are two in Santa Ana traceable to the person who came across the border and another recently detected in Usulután had not traveled abroad. The Government is closely tracking cases and you can get up-to-date information at https://covid19.gob.sv.

On March 28th the President and his cabinet announced a subsidy of $300 for each household in the informal sector. He also reported on the advancement of the construction of a 3,000-bed hospital including 1,000 ICU beds to deal with an eventual outbreak. He said that everyone who needed treatment would get it equally, whether rich or poor, with or without insurance. President Bukele also said that private hospitals would be put at the service of attending to patients if the public capacity did not hold up. Many people who entered their identity cards in the government website did not appear as beneficiaries of the $300, which created chaos and a breaking of the quarantine on March 31, as people flooded government offices to remedy the situation. Some unscrupulous opposition political party organizers and mayors took advantage of people’s hunger and mobilized buses to the government office, adding to the discontent and chaos. Within a few hours, the government shut down its office and announced that a web site would be facilitated for people not on the list who met the requirements of not having formal employment. Most of the population do not have a bank account to receive a direct deposit, and the majority live on the edge with what they bring in through informal employment.