SISTER CITY NEWS

A first-hand report on Teosinte

(The following is part of a regular feature in The Advocate on Arlington's sister cities)

By JUDI PARADIS
Special to The Advocate

Alice Linsmeier, an American church worker who lives in Teosinte, visited Arlington in July to give the Arlington-El Salvador Sister City Committee a first-hand report of life in our sister village.

Linsmeier has lived in Teosinte since its resettlement last August. She was working at a refugee camp outside of San Salvador last summer when archdiocese asked for volunteers to accompany the refugees returning to Teosinte. Linsmeier said the return of Teosinte was difficult due to pressure from the Salvadoran military "who did not want church or international accompaniment. On our way to Teosinte we passed through military checkpoints with over 100 soldiers where there were normally only 7 or 8."

When the refugees returned to Teosinte in late August, the rainy season had begun, and only two houses remained standing. She said a major program was begun to provide all the villagers with housing, constructing new homes from mud bricks.

In addition, the villagers have done major road repairs, cleared tracts of mountainous land to plant corn and have begun a project to raise cows to provide protein for the large number of children in the village. At present each child receives a glass of milk every 12 days.

"The community meets daily at dawn," she recounted, "to review the previous day's work and to plan projects for the coming day." Monday through Thursday the villagers all work on community projects, and they have the rest of the week to devote to individual projects.

She found the amount to villagers had accomplished to be inspiring considering that there were just 300 villagers, half of whom were children, and few adult men had survived the military repression of the early 1980s.

Teosinte was originally an affluent town of about 1,200 people, and villagers are currently at work to rebuild a large Catholic church partially destroyed in the war. "A coordinating committee of the Catholic church is helping with this," said Linsmeier.

The Church is also providing food until the first village crop of beams and corn can be harvested. Linsmeier reported that the first shipment of food had to be carried into the village from a location over three hours away because the military would not let the trucks into Teosinte.

Linsmeier said her current role in Teosinte is still primarily one of accompaniment and serving as a witness in case of human rights violations. In addition, she helps out with various village projects including providing support for teachers in the school that has been established, and offering patoral support when a priest cannot reach the village. She has also helped the villagers established a community store, which is important in a village as isolated as Teosinte.

Conditions in El Salvador are growing worse since the election of President Alfredo Christiani in March according to Linsmeier, who told the group that "both the number of tortures and the severity of torture is now on the increase."

In addition, she told committee members that "the Church is being denied access to the repopulation areas such as Teosinte for delivery of food and other necessary supplies." She also said that there are reports of repression of Church workers in El Salvador. Linsmeier said that U.S. citizens should request that "Congress reconsider aid to El Salvador" in light of these developments.

Linsmeier said that the villagers in Teosinte have received shipments of clothing and toys from Arlington, and are planning to use funds raised for their cow project and to complete a water purification system. She showed slides of posters the villagers had made welcoming Arlington delegates and expressing solidarity between our towns.

The Sister City Committee continues to fundraise for Teosinte. These interested in working with the committee can contact Judi Paradis at 646-4283, or write to us in care of the Arlington Central America Committee, P.O. Box 311, Arlington.

07.8 07.9 *(Judi Paradis is a resident of Arlington.)*