Central America is steeped in rich cultural heritage and historically has enjoyed the benefits of ethnically diverse communities. It is home to such ancient yet advanced cultures as the Mayan and Mesquite peoples. Yet, Central America has also been the object of massive intervention and brutality against innocent people by both outside colonial powers and indigenous dictatorships. Though originally rich in natural and human resources, most countries in Central America in the last several centuries have had their natural resources plundered and their human resources turned into slaves for the benefit of the dominating powers. The majority of the people in Central America are now poor subsistence farmers or compesinos. While poor in material goods, these compesinos, like the poor around the world, have much to teach us about unrelenting faith, love of family and friends, and building communities of caring without regard to economic status.

This St. Joseph’s University/Scranton University international alumni service immersion will visit the country of El Salvador. This tiny country, about the size of Massachusetts, is located on the Pacific coast of Central America and is bordered by Guatemala to the west and Honduras to the north and east.

El Salvador’s name still evokes images of the brutal civil war fought throughout the 1980s. During the war, the government assumed that the Catholic Church supported communism because it sympathized with the poor, and it targeted the church with violence. Numerous priests, nuns and religious missionaries were assassinated, the most well-known being Monsignor Oscar Romero, the Archbishop, who was killed saying Mass in San Salvador in 1981. Right wing death squads were known to target not only FMLN guerillas, but trade unionists, agrarian reformers and anyone sympathizing with the plight of the poor. During the course of the 12-year war, over 75,000 people were killed and the US government donated over $6 billion to the government’s war effort. The peace accords were signed by the Salvadoran government and the
FMLN in January 1992. Many Salvadorans consider El Salvador’s current situation to be no better now than before the civil war. Unemployment, poverty, disgruntled ex-combatants and a proliferation of guns in the country have led to high homicide and other crime rates - just some of the reasons why nearly 20% of Salvadorans now live abroad. But organizations from around the world are helping to rebuild El Salvador since the civil war, and especially after the devastation caused by Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and the earthquakes in early 2001 - programs devoted to education, agriculture reform, reforestation, human rights and health care.

Our pilgrimage to El Salvador will begin with our flight from Miami to San Salvador. With assistance from our collaborative organization, Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad (CIS), we will be visiting both urban and rural areas of the country, and meeting with Christian base communities, religious and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the country, and community leaders, as well as have plenty of opportunities to just dialogue with the people of El Salvador.

We will visit areas damaged by Hurricane Mitch and the January 2001 earthquakes, spend time in San Salvador visiting the Monsignor Oscar Romero sites, visit with a Jesuit liberation theologian at the Catholic University of El Salvador, and hear speakers from a variety of sectors - political, human rights, religious, social and economic. Our pilgrimage will conclude with a silent retreat and closing worship at a guest house on the Pacific coast of El Salvador.

The $2,000 trip fee covers pre-trip preparatory materials, round-trip airfare from Miami to San Salvador, trip leadership, administrative expenses, translators, speaker honoraria, local ground travel, traveler’s insurance and all meals & lodging.

As with all Ministry of Money immersion experiences, our focus is to be an open presence for God to speak to our hearts through the lives and relationships we experience in El Salvador. Alongside our encounters with poverty, natural disasters, and political transition, our pilgrimage experience is also an encounter with hope. Through these encounters and time spent in reflection, pilgrims are provided with opportunities to examine their faith responses and experience the gift of transformation.

For more information about this immersion trip to El Salvador or to receive a trip application, please contact:

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