

If one thing is cheap in El Salvador, it's corn. That's the problem. You can grow plenty of corn, but you can't sell it for profit. The Salvadorans often get together around corn. The men harvest it; the women shuck it, strip and boil the kernels, then they grind them by hand to make the cornmeal for tortillas. One community we visited recently installed a corn mill. Women crank it up and the engine roars. Then women and children from nearby households bring bowlfuls of corn. They pour it in the top of the mill, mix it with water, and out comes damp cornmeal like moist clay. They take it home, pat it into tortillas, and toss them onto the stove. Fresh tortillas are a Salvadoran delicacy, but they also symbolize the joy of community, and the sorrows of economic hardship. You can't sell corn. Might as well eat it.

The corn mill serves as a community center. The women come three times a day to prepare cornmeal for the men. I suggested to the women with me from St. Regis, that we could bring this idea home. We could erect a corn mill somewhere on the grass. And three times a day the women from St. Regis could walk up here from their homes, prepare fresh cornmeal for the men, then walk home again and make tortillas. The women with me from St. Regis very nearly ran me through the corn mill.

Even though we have no corn mill, our parish has become a center where people meet and greet. We gather for worship, first and foremost. Hundreds of kids come here for school. People come for counseling, wakes, food, emergency assistance, early childhood care, marriage preparation, and sports. Many of us share this parish with our closest friends. Our love for God and one another blossoms in a thousand ways and across a thousand shores. Your contributions to St. Regis make this possible. Thank you. Thank you for your sacrifice, for witnessing the love of Jesus for people at home and abroad.

During the next fiscal year we'll need your support even more. We want to reward our hard-working staff. We want to keep quality, Catholic education an option for our parents. Our property needs repair: the parking lot, sidewalks, windows, carpets -- even the rectory roof. After an inspection last week Mike Thomas tells me I'm lucky to be alive. Apart from our own needs we believe in the importance of sharing with Comunidad Ita Maura, the Community Assistance Council, the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, and other agencies. Charity is a way of life at St. Regis. We never encourage families to practice it without striving to practice it as a parish.

Next weekend we make our annual commitment to St. Regis. An increase in your pledge will help us immensely. We recommend your annual pledge equal 5% of your adjusted gross income. Pledging takes faith. It trusts that God will provide. People who give live with less and find happiness more.

On the surface, it looks like God did not distribute the goods of this earth with an even hand. Some people have very little -- much less than what you have. Others have a lot. But God placed one natural resource equally all around the world: the goodness of the human heart. By pledging to St. Regis, and by practicing a life of charity, you make the

entire world a better place.

Again, thank you for your contributions, and join me in a pledge to St. Regis next weekend.