

The five of us from St. Regis travelling to El Salvador last week are anxious to tell you about the trip, but for now I just want you to know that we broadened the relationship with our remarkable sister parish, Comunidad Ita Maura, and we strengthened ourselves as a community of pilgrims. We shared stories, we shared luggage, we shared snacks, we shared money. Often we slept in the same room; we surrendered our privacy, but we enhanced our compassion. The people of Ita Maura inspired us with their hospitality, their simplicity, and their care for each member of the community.

The sharing that we saw and the sharing that we lived fit well with the sharing which marks St. Regis Parish. We share one building: church, school, offices, meeting rooms, athletic and recreational space. We share one faith: praying at Mass, serving the needy here and far away, educating, and counseling those burdened with the sorrows of life. We share one neighborhood: a neighborhood of many incomes, races, and creeds. And we share one set of values: the value of human life, the value of truth, and the value of service.

Naturally, because we share so much, we also share our material goods, \$1,300,000 a year. You wouldn't think to look around this church that folks like us can do that, but we can, because we share things that matter: our faith, our values, our building, and our income.

Again this year I thank you who pledge your support and fulfill your pledge. It's you who permit us to bury the dead, to educate children, to congratulate the newly married, and to have fun as a Christian community. Some of you can give only a little, but you do so lovingly. Many of you do not pledge--for various reasons. You don't want to be committed, you think you can't afford charity, you're angry at us because we didn't serve you well when you needed us most. If you don't pledge, I beg you to think this through. Unwillingness to pledge usually signals a poorly committed faith. Most who do not pledge do not serve the church in other ways either. They take the benefits from a parish without sharing its mission. If that's you--~~we have~~ ^{we have} served you poorly, because ~~you've missed~~ ^{I haven't revealed to you} what church is about. It's about receiving, but it's about giving.

Before we left Comunidad Ita Maura last week we gave a donation to the people for their hospitality. The president of the community looked around the room at what he had offered us: 8 padded mats stretched out on the concrete floor of their new kindergarten, no drinkable water, no hot water, no indoor plumbing, an outhouse fifty feet away, an outdoor shower for women several hundred feet away, and an outdoor shower for men thousands of feet further, home-cooked meals three times a day, but always the same menu: beans, rice, eggs, and tortillas. Rolando looked at the \$335 we gave him for our two nights, and he said, "We cannot accept this as payment for our hospitality, but we do accept it as a gift of your friendship." That's the spirit of your pledge today. It's not a payment for services you may or may not have received. It's not like paying for dry cleaning, watermelon, or a ballgame. It's a gift. In sharing our gift we reveal who we are: a living Christian community.