

UPDATE on the AMERICAS

A bi-monthly publication of the Rochester Committee on Latin America

A Taskforce of Metro Justice

Winter 2010



ROCLA'S Rice & Beans Dinner and White Dove Awards

FOOD, FUN, SILENT AUCTION

FRIDAY, MARCH 19, 5:30 PM

DOWNTOWN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH 121 NORTH FITZHUGH ST, ROCHESTER

We are honored to announce the recipients of the 2010 White Dove Awards:
International White Dove Award to Sister Dianna Ortiz, author of *The Blindfold's Eyes: My Journey from Torture to Truth*, founder of Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition—or TASSC—the only organization in the United States made up of survivors of torture, and currently Director of the Washington Office of Pax Christi International.

Local White Dove Award to Dr. John (Lory) Ghertner, who started Church Watch to protect the migrant Hispanic community so that they could attend Mass; Migrant Support Services to advocate for and support the emergency needs of local neighbors; and Kids for College, which is actively supporting 12-15 migrant children yearly to help them gain entrance into college.

He also is a member of the board of the Rural and Migrant Ministry.

COST: \$15.00 - \$25.00/person (sliding scale)

[No one turned away for lack of funds.]

Catered by Savory Thyme

PLEASE MAKE YOUR RESERVATIONS RIGHT NOW BY CALLING

Marilyn Kaiser at 293-3194 or Gail Mott at 391-5606



Sister Dianna Ortiz

Read Sr. Ortiz' and Dr. Ghertner's bios on page 3.

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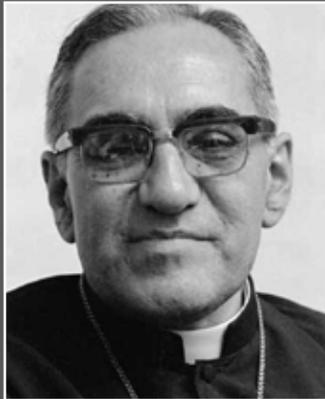
*ROCLA Programs and Actions every
First Wednesday 7:00 PM Downtown
Presbyterian Church 121 N. Fitzhugh
St. Free and open to the public.
Wheelchair accessible
Free parking across the street in
City Hall Parking Lot*

Metro Justice Education Fund
THE ROCHESTER COMMITTEE
ON LATIN AMERICA
167 Flanders St.
Rochester, NY 14619

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Vigil to Remember the 20th Anniversary of the Assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero by graduates of the US Army School of the Americas



Since 1946 the SOA/WHINSEC has trained Latin American soldiers, funded by our tax dollars. Graduates from this facility have committed human rights abuses throughout Central and South America. We want the SOA/WHINSEC closed and a Congressional investigation conducted to document its record of human rights violations. Two of the three men responsible for Archbishop Romero's murder were trained at the SOA.

JOIN US ON
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24, 4 PM
IN FRONT OF THE FEDERAL BUILDING
100 STATE STREET, ROCHESTER, NY

For more information contact
soawrochester@yahoo.com or 585-729-7054.

BUFFALO SPECIAL EVENT

Tuesday, March 23.

Christine Eber, Activist Anthropologist and professor at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, will talk about Hope & Resistance: Indigenous Women of Highland Chiapas - The initiative of Mayan women in the struggle for dignity, autonomy and cultural survival. Daemen College, 4380 Main St, Wickes Center, Buffalo.

Tuesday, March 23.

6:30 PM - Social and wine & cheese
7:45 PM - Speaker

This is the the 29th Annual Father A. Joseph Bissonette Latin America Event sponsored by the Latin American Solidarity Committee of the WNY Peace Center.

\$15. Checks payable to WNY Peace Center/Humanitarian Aid. Send to: WNY Peace Center, 1272 Delaware Ave. Buffalo, NY 14209

GOOD NEWS!

In October Randall Shea reported the good news from Santa María Tzejá, Guatemala, that Natividad Lux Santos, a Maya K'iche' indigenous woman, received her law degree from the University of San Carlos in Guatemala City. "Natividad is the second village resident to graduate from the university this year. She is also the first woman lawyer in the entire Ixcán region of Guatemala where we live.

"Natividad is one of 11 children, two boys and 9 girls, of Juan Lux and Isabel Santos. Speaking of her parents, Natividad wrote in a September 2000 letter that they came to Santa María Tzejá "in 1970 when they were able to receive a piece of land they could



Natividad with her parents and a little bit of Randall Shea

farm and survive on. They came in search of a better life, and thanks to the help of a Spanish priest, they received land that was given to the neediest poor farmers." Natividad was born in 1975 in the rainforest settlement of Santa María Tzejá. In spite of the heavy rains, mud, mosquitoes and above all, the intense jungle heat, her parents were successful in building a home, in clearing and planting fields and achieving a better life than the one they had left behind in the Guatemalan highlands. Their success was truncated in 1982 by the Guatemalan government's counterinsurgency rampage which destroyed Santa María Tzejá, along with hundreds of other rural communities and forced all of the residents to flee into hiding in the nearby jungle. Natividad recalls that the 'state's scorched earth policy claimed many innocent lives, including men, women, children and the elderly. The violence affected us in a way we never dreamed possible, and put us in a position of dependence that even today we are struggling to overcome.'

"Natividad has already met with the community development council in Santa María Tzejá, a council in which I participate, looking for ways to offer her services to our community. The council provided her with office space, and Natividad comes to our village every other Saturday afternoon and provides legal advice and orientation to village residents at no charge. For those residents who need her services to a greater and more ongoing extent, Natividad offers a significantly reduced fee, as a way giving back to her home community."

Bio of Sr. Dianna Ortiz

- by Malcolm Bell

Sister Dianna Ortiz, O.S.U., is a person of exceptional courage, determination, achievement, and humility.

She was born in Colorado, grew up in New Mexico, received a degree in education from Brescia College, and joined the Order of St. Ursula in Maple Mount, Kentucky. She was happily teaching young children, whom she loves, when she felt that God was calling her to serve the oppressed Maya of Guatemala; and so in 1987 she journeyed to San Miguel Acatan in the western highlands of that war-torn nation to teach Mayan children. Unaccountably, she received increasingly violent threats, but she determined to stay for the Maya, whom she now considered her people.

On November 2, 1989, she was kidnapped and horribly tortured until the next morning when she seized an opportunity to escape. Tellingly, U.S. officials became furious and revictimized her when she insisted that the man in charge of her torturers was an American. There followed painful years of seeking rehabilitation for herself, an end to the violence against her people, and justice for herself and for them. She joined the staff of the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA in Washington in 1994 and in 1998 became the founding director of the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition International (www.tassc.org). In 2002, she published *The Blindfold's Eyes: My Journey from Torture to Truth* (Orbis Books), which cannot be read without expanding one's view of what torture really means. She is currently Director of the Washington Office of Pax Christi International.

Sister Dianna has spoken out repeatedly against torture though she still relives her horror each time she relates it. She has pioneered creative ways for survivors of torture to support each other. Hers is a voice too seldom heard in the ongoing debate over torture: the voice of a survivor.



Bio of Dr. John (Lory) Ghertner: Local White Dove Award Recipient

In his own words:

"I grew up in the deep South in the 50s and 60s, riding in the back of the bus as the only voice a dumb, little kid could have.

"After Colby College and the University of Tennessee Medical School, I did my residency in Internal Medicine at the University of Rochester, followed by initially practicing medicine in Sodus, NY. There, I was the physician for the migrant community, and as the Wayne County Public Health Director made visits to migrant camps to deliver health care and patient education.

"With the work I had been doing with my wife as she has been completing her film of migrant women, *After I Picked the Fruit* (now in post-production) I again became friends with the migrant community. I witnessed first hand the horrible emotional conditions of the migrant farmworkers and have developed several programs to address the needs of our neighbors:

- Church Watch was started to protect the Hispanic community so that they could attend Mass.

- Migrant Support Services was started to advocate for and support the emergency needs of our local neighbors.
- Kids for College is actively supporting 12-15 migrant children yearly to help them gain entrance into college.

"I am on the board of the Rural and Migrant Ministry and other not-for-profit organizations and a member of the New York State Farm Bureau."

[*Ed. note: Lory works passionately on behalf of immigrant workers and is tireless in promoting beneficial legislation. He educates national and local reporters on the farm labor situation and need for comprehensive immigration reform, sends out regular action alerts about farmworker and immigration legislation, monitors Border Patrol activity, and works against the ongoing raids and detention – for starters!*]

ROCLA's 2010 Contributions

Every year the Steering Committee is pleased to announce its 2010 contributions. Every year we have to make hard choices about which organizations and individuals to support. Please let ROCLA Convener, Bob Kaiser, know if you have questions or would like more information about any of the groups listed below. Rkaiser3@rochester.rr.com. We will be raising money for the IFCO/Pastors for Peace Friendship to Cuba in the spring.

LOCAL RECIPIENTS

Farmworker Legal Services, Rochester	\$100
VIVE, Buffalo	\$200
Rural and Migrant Ministry	\$100
Centro Independiente de	
Trabajadores Agrícolas	\$ 50
Immigration Law Program	\$100

LATIN AMERICAN PROJECTS INVOLVING ROCHESTERIANS

New high school, Guatemala	
- Randall Shea	\$250
Water and education project, Haiti	
- Sarah Brownell	\$200
Rural village development projects, Dominican Republic - Joanne Peterson	\$100
Sustainable agriculture and water project, Guatemala - Todd Bauer	\$150
EPIC - in memory of K'ai Clouds, agronomist	\$ 50

US-LATIN AMERICA

SOLIDARITY ORGANIZATIONS

Haiti - Institute for Justice/Democracy	\$100
CISPES	\$100
Nicaragua Network	\$100
NISGUA	\$100

SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT ORGANIZING:

Latin America Solidarity Coalition (LASC)	\$100
INTERCONNECT	\$100
Downtown Presbyterian Church, for ROCLA meetings	\$100

If An Agent Knocks...

After the successful 20th Friendship Caravan, Rev. Lucius Walker wrote a letter to the Pastors for Peace network saying, in part:

“We want to inform you that the IFCO/Pastors for Peace office received a “visit” from two FBI agents only one day after the Mexico/US border crossing. On Aug 4th agents arrived saying that they were doing “community outreach” and stopped by our office to chat and talk with us. They directly asked if they could come in and talk with us. Of course, we followed the same advice we give everybody who travels with us. We said, “No, you cannot come in.”

We asked for their address and promised to have our attorney write to them. Our staff then immediately sat down, wrote a statement to describe in detail exactly what had transpired, who said what- every detail. We did this while the visit was fresh in our memories...

“You are under no obligation to talk with the FBI or let them into your home or workplace.”

Rev. Walker recommended the Center for Constitutional Rights’ booklet, *If An Agent Knocks: What to do if you or your organization are targeted by federal law enforcement*. Also, the ACLU’s *Know Your Rights* booklet (www.aclu.org) provides effective and useful guidance addressing what rights you have when you are stopped, questioned, arrested, or searched by law enforcement officers, including a section covering what can happen to you at airports and other points of entry into the United States.

E-Members

A big “Thank You” to all members who signed up to receive *Update On The Americas* by e-mail. The e-version will be ready for the next issue. We’re looking to add to our e-list, so please contact Marilyn Kaiser at rkaiser3@rochester.rr.com if you’d like to switch from print to e-mail.

HOWARD ZINN - !PRESENTE!

The outpouring of heartfelt tributes to Howard Zinn, who died on January 27, indicates how profoundly he affected everyone who met him, attended protests with him, heard him speak, or read his commentaries and books. We – like so many – feel we have lost a wonderful, irreplaceable friend.



About 20 years ago, when he came to Rochester at the request of a number of us who were campaigning – under Jon Greenbaum’s leadership – to stop Rochester’s annual Columbus Day Parade, he spoke to an audience of over 600 people about the truth of Columbus’ “discovery.” After the talk we had the privilege of driving him back to his hotel and offered to take him for a midnight snack on the way. “Well, I do like ice cream,” he admitted. And so we stopped at Friday’s where he ordered an 18” high ice cream sundae and, eyes twinkling, relished every spoonful.

That he cared about Latin America and was quick to grasp implications of US policy there is evident in his Preface to *Masters of War: Latin America and US Aggression from the Cuban Revolution Through the Clinton Years* by Clara Nieto (Seven Stories Press, 2003), Zinn writes: “In 1927 Undersecretary of State Robert Olds wrote a confidential memorandum to his colleagues:

‘We do control the destinies of Central America. Until now Central America has always understood that governments which we recognize and support stay in power, while those which we do not recognize and support fall.’

That statement would be an accurate description of the attitude of the United States government to all of Latin America, from the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 to the present day. It leads to a disturbing thought: that the United States has, throughout its history, been an aggressive, expansionist imperial power, especially in relation to Latin America.”

For a tribute that gives a true measure of Howard Zinn - his humor, his integrity, his philosophy - go to www.ireport.com/docs/DOC-402231 Howard Zinn: My Courageous Friend by William Holtzman. You might also enjoy: www.thenation.com/.../howard_zinn_the_historian_who_made_history by David Zirin; and http://www.democracynow.org/tags/howard_zinn - a marvelous collection of his appearances on Democracy Now.

GOOD NEWS

FAIR TRADE: The ripple effect

Recently, ROCLA friend Joseph Sorrentino, a visual artist and fair trade activist, went to The Canal-town Coffee Roasters, 6 S Main St in Pittsford. He reported:

“Two of my postcards promoting Fair Trade coffee were hanging up. I asked the woman behind the counter if she knew who had put them there and she said she had. She had attended a talk I gave at Nazareth College, picked up the postcards and posted them. But the thing that made me feel really good is she convinced the shop’s owner to buy Fair Trade coffee and

they now offer several kinds. There are so many times when I question what I’m doing. Today gave me one answer. Thanks for supporting me.”



The campesina is Maria and she’s picking coffee in Tacuapan, Puebla, Mexico. This coffee will be sold to Tosepan Tiitataniske, a FT cooperative in Cuetzalan, Puebla. Photo by Joseph Sorrentino.

[Ed. note: Fair trade coffee available at Abundance Co-op; Women’s Coffee Connection; 681 South Ave; and One World Goods.]

An Appreciation

Special thanks to ROCLA’s Volunteer Webmaster Jim Bearden, Professor of Sociology a SUNY Geneseo.. Jim is constantly updating information, and you can find the latest at www.rocla.org.

DISASTER IN HAITI

All of us are shaken to the core by the agony and suffering we have been seeing daily on our screens. It is in good part Western economic and political domination of Haiti that has left the people there completely vulnerable. How can we respond for the long term? Jubilee USA urges us to call on the Obama administration to take two specific steps to ensure a quick and just response to the crisis in Haiti: (1) Provide massive assistance for relief and reconstruction in the form of grants, not loans; (2) Cancel the rest of Haiti's debt. The World Bank announced that it is putting a moratorium on debt service for five years – a positive first step; and the IMF has announced a moratorium on debt service for two years. But it is essential to keep strong pressure on these institutions and our government.

Before the earthquake, on December 16, 2009, The Jubilee Act for Responsible Lending and Expanded Debt Cancellation (HR 4405) was introduced, apparently with strong bipartisan support. "It cancels impoverished country debt, prohibits harmful economic and policy conditions on debt cancellation, mandates transparency and responsibility in lending from governments and international financial institutions, and calls for a U.S. audit of debts resulting from odious and illegitimate lending." It was referred to House Committee on Financial Services and has no co-sponsors. Urge your Congressperson to co-sponsor this legislation.

[Ed. note: We all know that Haiti is the poorest country in this Hemisphere. The question is: How did Haiti get to be this poor, this malnourished, this deforested, this full of crumbling structures – this unprepared for a "natural" disaster? The story is as complex as the nation's history.]

When Haiti's slave rebellion succeeded in producing the second free republic (the first Black Republic) in the Americas it was only a few years after we became the first. Yet the US did not recognize Haiti until the 1860's. After Haiti pushed out the French they (the French) succeeded in slapping the winners with a huge bill for reparations for French losses. In the 20th century the US occupied Haiti from 1915-1934, then supported the Duvalier dictators, Papa Doc (1957-1971) and Baby Doc (1971-1986). When Haitians finally elected a reform president (Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a former liberation theologian, was elected twice - democratically and overwhelmingly

- with the goal of decreasing poverty), we supported one military coup in 1991 and we organized and carried out the second coup in 2003.

Since that shameful history we, along with Canada and France, have continued to pressure the UN "peacekeepers" to violently repress every uprising of the people, including the use of multiple assassinations.

Why was President Aristide abducted? Apparently because he opposed "The Washington Consensus"/ corporate globalization/a "neoliberal" economic system. Aristide did not want to adhere to IMF and World Bank rules by cutting many public services or privatizing many industries. One of his goals was to raise the minimum wage.

Since that time the US has kept President Preval's hands tied and he has been unable to make any changes in the economic system.]

Nicaragua is Free of Illiteracy!

—by Arnie Matlin

One of the greatest achievements of the Sandinista revolution was the Nicaraguan Literacy Campaign. In 1980, only four months after of the Sandinista victory, almost 100,000 volunteers were trained in basic literacy techniques. They were then sent out to the countryside to teach the campesinos and campesinas to read. It's almost unbelievable that at the time, late in the 20th Century, the literacy rate in Nicaragua was only about 50%! When the Literacy Campaign was completed, this number had been increased to 88%. In September 1980, UNESCO awarded Nicaragua the prestigious Krupskaya Literacy Award in recognition of this immense achievement.

Unfortunately, after the right-wing election victory in 1990, education languished in Nicaragua, and literacy was no longer a priority. In January 2007, after 16 years of right-wing government, the rate of literacy had fallen to 78%.

In March 2007, right after Daniel Ortega again became President of Nicaragua, the Sandinistas began a new literacy campaign. This new campaign was based on the "Yo Sí Puedo" ("Yes, I Can") Cuban teaching method.

Continued on next page

The Alcaldesa's visit

—Michael Argaman

The Ciudad Hermana Task Force is a sister task force of ROCLA's at MetroJustice. Ciudad Hermana has had an ongoing relationship with the town of El Sauce in Nicaragua since the mid 1990s when the Sandinista revolution was in its first period of governing Nicaragua.

In October of 2009, the new mayor of El Sauce, Rosita Valle Vargas of the FSLN (Frente Sandinista) visited Rochester. She was the third consecutive El Sauce mayor to visit here; all of them through the generous assistance of the Paul Wenger Fund for Peace Through International Understanding of the First Unitarian Church.

When Mayor Nubia Luna visited in 2001, the result was the establishment of a program that sends medical students from the University of Rochester medical school to do a rotation in rural medicine at the clinic in El Sauce. When Mayor Evertz Delgadillo visited in 2005, the result was the establishment of an ongoing relationship between SUNY Geneseo and El Sauce with numerous programs in the fields of education, eco-tourism and economic development.

Mayor Rosita Valle Vargas had a busy schedule in Rochester and Western New York, which included:

- talks to solidarity groups (ROCLA, Ciudad Hermana, the Rochester Labor Council and the Buffalo Latin America Solidarity Committee)
- political advocacy (meetings with Eric Massa's staff, Louise Slaughter's staff and Mayor Robert Duffy)
- education (Monroe High School, School #12 and SUNY Geneseo)
- healthcare (Alternatives for Battered Women, University of Rochester medical school, Noyes Hospital in Dansville, 1199 SEIU healthcare workers union, Ibero-American Promotores de Salud and Wade Norwood of the Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency)
- cultural events (Labor Film Series at the Dryden Theatre and Latino Heritage Day at the Memorial Art Gallery)
- economic development (One World Goods, Kingdom Ventures, Once Again Nut Butter Company, Coffee Connection, City of Rochester Department of Economic Development and Latino Rotary Club)

As a result of this visit, some of the benefits we anticipate are:

- the establishment of a sister hospital relationship between the new Barrio Rochester hospital in El Sauce and Noyes Hospital in Dansville
- the establishment of an ongoing relationship between the Rochester Labor Council and two unions in El Sauce: FETSALUD healthcare workers union and ANDEN teachers union
- greater assistance from our local congressional representatives on legislative issues regarding US-Latin America relations
- the establishment of an ongoing relationship between the Rochester City School District and the schools in El Sauce
- possibilities of imports of El Sauce-produced fair trade goods such as baskets, sesame, honey and coffee
- donations of computers and books for the El Sauce municipal library

The Ciudad Hermana Task Force of MetroJustice thanks all who helped make the visit a success.

Nicaragua is Free of Illiteracy! (*Continued*)

The "Yo Sí Puedo" program consists of 65 lessons (each 45 minutes long), which are shown on television. The duration of the learning process depends on the frequency of the lessons, but it is typically between two and three months. The program uses examples that are drawn from daily life, and incorporates topics like religion, geography, music, customs, and traditions of Nicaragua.

Through the "Yo si Puedo" program, about 300,000 Nicaraguans have been taught to read. By January 2010, the literacy rate in Nicaragua had risen to 96.7%!

On June 22, 2009, an independent commission created by the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) declared that Nicaragua had a literacy level of more than 95%, qualifying it as a country "free of illiteracy."

This achievement of a progressive government demonstrates once again that—even in a resource-poor country like Nicaragua—creativity and a government's goal of helping the neediest people can bring about enormous progress.

**The Rochester Committee on Latin America (ROCLA) invites you to
SAVE THE DATE for the
annual Rice & Beans Dinner and White Dove Awards**



FOOD, FUN, SILENT AUCTION
Catered by Savory Thyme
FRIDAY, MARCH 19th, 5:30 PM
DOWNTOWN UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
121 NORTH FITZHUGH ST, ROCHESTER

COST: \$15.00 - \$25.00/person (sliding scale)
[No one turned away because of lack of funds]

Call Marilyn Kaiser at 585-293-3194 or Gail Mott at 585-381-5606
or email: RKaiser3@rochester.rr.com

[The church is wheelchair accessible and looped for the hearing impaired.]



Rice and Beans Dinner Auction Item

Come explore the Finger Lakes region in the copilot seat as we fly over the wine country, glide through the valleys between the lakes, and just explore the meaning of flight. You will have the opportunity to actually fly the plane for as much of the trip as you like. And more! This is a trip of a lifetime for two.

This is worth \$250-400, depending on what we do.

ROCHESTER COMMITTEE ON LATIN AMERICA (ROCLA)

ROCLA for many years has sought to be a bridge between the Rochester community and the people of Latin America. Monthly meetings on the 1st Wednesday of each month at the Downtown United Presbyterian Church provide an opportunity to learn more about what is going on in that part of the world. In addition to providing information, ROCLA is committed to working for systemic justice and supports numerous organizations that are on the front line of this endeavor. School of the Americas Watch, the Mexico Solidarity Network, Rights Action and the Rochester Labor Film Festival are among the many groups that receive assistance and encouragement.

ROCLA Steering Committee

Dr. Arnold Matlin, Marilyn Anderson, David Eisenberg, Hernan Escalante, Marilyn and Bob Kaiser (convener), John Locke, Gail and Peter Mott, Vic Vinkey, Mike Wahl, Tom Ward..

Update on the Americas Publishing Team

Editors: Gail and Peter Mott; Designer: John Locke

**PLEASE PRINT AND RETURN
THIS RESERVATION FORM!**

Name: _____

____ Yes, save me a seat(s) at the Rice & Beans dinner!

I've enclosed a check for \$ _____ for _____ reservations.

____ Sorry, I can't attend Rice & Beans dinner, but I want to help ROCLA's solidarity work. I've enclosed a check for \$ _____.

Tickets are \$15.00 to \$25.00 per person (sliding scale). All tickets will be held at the door.

Mail completed form to:

MARILYN KAISER 150 ATTRIDGE RD.
CHURCHVILLE NY 14428