

## A Brief Summary of Our Nineteen Day Hunger Strike at the St. Paul Cathedral

- "Our hunger strike is a voice that cries out for justice."

### 1. The Situation Leading to the Hunger Strike

Ten years of hard struggle by the Salvadoran people against their oppressors have gone by without either clarifying to the U.S. public the reasons for the conflict or awakening them out of indifference. Only recently has the U.S. public felt the impact of events occurring in El Salvador, starting with the offensive of the FMLN in the capital city, San Salvador. Even then, the North American people still remained confused and distanced from the conflict, partly as a result of the strong media campaign by the Bush Administration.

It is clear that the intensification of the struggle in El Salvador, due to the resistance and capacity of the FMLN to sustain their offensive, created more interest in the U.S. public and motivated them to act in greater solidarity with the Salvadoran people. This was particularly true when the news broke of the indiscriminate bombing of civilian populations in San Salvador. However, the single incident which created the condemnation, the awakening and greater commitment of the U.S. public was the assassination of six Jesuit priests and their two housekeepers. Then, one sensed that genocide had reached its limit and that there existed in the cosmos a voice that clamored for justice and needed a way to express itself. At that moment, we chose to begin our humble but resolute hunger strike in defense of the Salvadoran people and the intrinsic respect for human dignity.

### 2. The Beginning of Our Hunger Strike (November 23, 1989)

On Thanksgiving Day, at 10:00 a.m., we attended mass at the St. Paul Cathedral. A group of supporters, whom we had notified privately of our decision, accompanied us in the Cathedral. Initially, the group of hunger strikers was composed of five Salvadoran refugees, a Bolivian and two U.S. citizens, including Fr. Roy Bourgeois, the spiritual guide of the group.

We made a simple, clear declaration. It focused on the true source of genocide in El Salvador: the military aid that the U.S. government gives to the government of El Salvador. The declaration stated:

We are people of faith from El Salvador and other Latin American countries. We mourn the deaths of the six Jesuit priests and all those murdered in El Salvador.

In the spirit of prayer we are conducting a hunger strike at the St. Paul Cathedral and we ask for an immediate end to all military aid that the United States government gives to the government of El Salvador. At the same time, we ask Archbishop John Roach to end his silence and join with us in asking for an immediate end to U.S. military aid to El Salvador.

In our country the Cathedral is a place where we can go to pray, take refuge, hold a hunger strike, and express our needs. In our country the clergy are the voice of the

voiceless.

We invite all people of conscience to join with us.

As it turned out, this short declaration came to be a powerful call to the people of the United States. The moment we declared our hunger strike, the Cathedral became a symbol of that voice which cries out for justice. The flow of individuals, delegations, musicians, telegrams, postcards, letters, children's drawings sent to us from schools, etc., was continuous and came to us from all directions. People of all ages, creeds, races, social strata and leadership capacities came to visit us, to ask us questions about the conflict in El Salvador and to support us.

#### A. A Few Events Which Occurred During the Hunger Strike

##### a) The small conflict with Archbishop Roach.

This conflict was set off by our initial declaration which included the following:

...At the same time we ask Archbishop John Roach to end his silence and join us in asking for an immediate end to U.S. military aid to El Salvador.

At 2:00 p.m. the same day that we had begun the hunger strike, Archbishop Roach presented himself, less than cordial and notably perturbed. He briefly informed us of his record in procuring peace in Central America and then showed us his correspondence to President Bush, Salvadoran President Cristiani and Salvadoran Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas. Finally, he let it be known that he was not pleased that we had indisposed him in this way, in view of his actions on behalf of El Salvador. We responded in a respectful manner and tried to make him understand that we had no malicious intent to indispose him, and that where he had remained silent was specifically regarding the issue of an immediate end to U.S. military aid -- aid which we were certain was the real cause of the genocide and the major obstacle to a political solution to the conflict in El Salvador.

Archbishop Roach recognized the validity of the above-mentioned point and promised to write another letter to President Bush to address the issue of military aid. In addition, upon our request that he send a letter to the Catholic community as the Lutheran bishops had done, he stated that he would consider it and make a later decision. These two letters have been published and we thank Archbishop Roach for writing them. Nevertheless, we feel the need to clarify that we do not share with Archbishop Roach his position that the United States should withhold a substantial portion of military aid to El Salvador while evaluating human rights and the willingness of the Salvadoran government to negotiate. Our disagreement is rooted in our belief that these conditions and evaluations prolong even more the suffering of the Salvadoran people and postpone the possibility of a political solution to the conflict, and that, in certain measure, such a position is an acceptance of the genocide. In addition, in the past, certain conditions have been placed on military aid but have not been met, as demonstrated by the continually worsening situation in El Salvador.

In any event, we thank Archbishop Roach for all that he has done for peace in Central America and for us during our stay at the Cathedral.

