

THEN JESUS SAID, "PUT YOUR SWORD BACK IN ITS SHEATH..."

By Phil Spitznagle

Violence, intimidation and threats from gangs threaten most communities in El Salvador including our sister city, San Raphael Cedros. The effects are widespread and leave a trail of fear and despair in their wake.

Education is a threat to the gangs, thus compelling its members to threaten our students and their families. In fact, the Ministry of Education stated that in 2014, over 100,000 students abandoned their education, citing insecurity as the primary reason followed by poverty and immigration. In 2016, Crisis Watch reported that over 330,000 El Salvadorans were displaced by violence. And in 2015, there were 6600 murders in the country, a similar death rate to that of Syria, and 20 times the rate in the US.

The New York Times reports three major territorial gangs: Mara Salvatrucha(MS-13) , Barrio 18 Revolutionarios. and Barrio 18 Surenos comprised of over 60000 members with tentacles in the US. Their motto "Mara, viola, controla" translates to "kill, rape, control."

Violence has many causes, social, familial and economic. CIS, our partner in El Salvador, has been quoted as saying, Violence doesn't exist because of the gangs. The gangs exist because of the violence." In spite of the challenges, our friends remain positive and hopeful partly because of the support of OLP. We ask for continued prayers and support.

Note: We received word last week that the brother of Harold, one of our university students was kidnapped and killed by gang members.