



Sister Parish, Inc./ Iglesias Hermanas FAQs

Sister Parish FAQs

Do member churches of Sister Parish, Inc. have to be Lutheran?

- While we do have Lutheran roots, Sister Parish, Inc. is an ecumenical organization which offers participants an inter-cultural faith experience and long-term, transformative relationship with people in Central American faith communities. Member churches include Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran (ELCA), Episcopal, Methodist, and Mayan traditional religion.

Is this a one time mission trip?

- No, Sister Parish is a different kind of “mission”, where participants build a long term relationship with a Central American faith community. Several relationships have lasted 10 years or longer. We ask for a minimum commitment of 3 years.

If we aren't going to “build” something, paint something, or hand something out, then what will we actually DO in Central America?

- You will be surprised at how busy you will be! The idea of each delegation is to foster an ever-deepening relationship between the two groups. Activities are carefully planned by staff, with input from both sides, to further the vision of consciousness-raising, solidarity, reconciliation, and ecumenism, and most importantly, to bring people together so that we can learn from each other.

Is our commitment/relationship primarily financial?

- No, the emphasis is on deepening the relationship, and in fact, direct financial aid and charity is discouraged from the outset. The relationship focuses on empowerment, especially in the Central American communities. Any project that is undertaken is done only when a solid relationship already exists and is driven by the Central Americans and mutually beneficial.

Can we choose any country in Latin America to work with?

- At the present time, we are only working in Guatemala and El Salvador, where we have staff to help ensure the continuity of the relationship.

Do we have to speak Spanish to participate in delegations?

- Sister Parish, Inc. staff in Central America is bilingual and is very happy to provide any translation or cultural interpretation necessary to both partners in the relationship. This includes letters, notes, e-mail communications, and translation on all delegations.

What will transportation and accommodations be like when we travel to Central America?

- On a typical delegation, you will stay in a simple but adequate guest house during the in-country orientation part of the trip, and you will travel in private, rented vehicles. You will always be accompanied by bilingual staff who live in

the country. While you visit your actual Central American faith community, you will stay in pairs in the homes of the people. We believe strongly that this is the best way to form bonds that deepen the relationship and allow for maximum interaction. Translation in the homes is provided.

How is Sister Parish, Inc. funded?

- Sister Parish, Inc. is a non-profit organization that relies on two main sources of income: donations from private individuals and income generated from charging a minimal administrative fee per delegate that travels. We also ask member churches to pay an annual linkage fee of \$500, which helps with program costs, and have an Annual Fund Drive at the end of each year. One hundred percent of our board and staff also generously donates to our organization.

Is it safe to travel?

- One of the strengths of Sister Parish, Inc. is that staff lives in Central America and so they are always aware of potential security risks and situations. There are no longer civil wars in either El Salvador or Guatemala, but there is delinquency and violence, not unlike large cities in the US. The staff takes every precaution and conducts a thorough safety orientation for each delegation. Travel is done in private vehicles to minimize risks. On occasion, if a situation seems volatile, delegations have been rescheduled to make sure safety is a priority.

What do you eat and what happens if I don't like the food?

- The staple diet varies from region to region in Guatemala and El Salvador, but corn tortillas are ever present at each meal. In Guatemala, it is very common to eat black beans (either refried or whole beans), eggs, and tortillas for supper and breakfast. In many communities, chicken soup is served for guests. In El Salvador, red beans are more commonly served with cheese, cream, and rice. You may also be served eggs, plantains, or other fried foods. In both countries, food is very salty, and coffee or tea is served very weak and already sweetened with sugar.
- If you don't like the food, we ask you to politely try to eat some anyway, after all, it is only for a few days. Central Americans have the same worries about food in the US and they also make an effort to eat what is served, even when they think it is too sweet or bland. The food that is served is a gift of hospitality to you, and is a way of learning more about people in different cultures. The exception to trying the food anyway is if there is a severe allergy that would preclude eating a certain item.

What does a delegation cost?

- \$1025 per person is the estimated cost for a 10 day trip **PLUS** \$500-\$900 per person is the estimated airfare, depending on what time of year you travel and where your flight leaves from.

NOTE: The \$1025 includes \$525 in administrative fees, and \$50 per person per day which covers all in country expenses while you travel (Food, drinking water, lodging, in country transportation, etc).

- Personal spending money: what you bring depends upon how much you wish to use for purchasing local crafts and gifts). This may vary from \$50 to several hundred, but remember that the purpose of this trip is to build relationships.