The living legacy of Saint Romero
People’s struggle for water echoes past leader’s call for justice

During his sermon March 23, 1980, as El Salvador plunged into what would become a twelve-year civil war, Archbishop Romero called for soldiers to stop the violence against the people of El Salvador. The very next day, he was murdered while leading mass.

Oscar Romero’s life and message are as relevant today as in the opening days of that long and brutal conflict. He urged listeners to look to a higher authority than that of governments ordering young men to oppress and kill, and believed the poor deserve and should make justice in this world. Romero’s dream lives on in the aspirations and leadership of our partners in El Salvador today.

It was just a matter of time until the Catholic Church recognized what so many people in El Salvador already know: in March 2018, under the leadership of Pope Francis, the Vatican announced that Archbishop Romero would soon become Saint Romero. He will be canonized October 14.

Like Romero, Pope Francis sees defending the most vulnerable members of society as central to social justice. He wrote in his encyclical Laudato si’:

In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes...

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One of the programs we are most proud to support is our partners’ work to restore degraded coastal ecosystems and protect the larger Bay of Jiquilisco watershed in El Salvador.

The Mangrove Association is named for the rich expanse of mangrove forest they safeguard and the irreplaceable services it provides, from nurturing juvenile fish and sheltering communities from hurricanes to helping us combat global climate change. Using proven techniques, they work to restore the natural hydrology of the forest to promote regrowth in damaged areas.

Our partners are also joining in a nationwide push to plant 5 million trees as part of the government-led effort Plantatón 2018. In a country as severely deforested as El Salvador, every tree planted helps prevent erosion, turn rainwater in groundwater, and contribute to a healthy watershed. This summer we want to raise as much as we can to support their initiatives to regenerate healthy ecosystems that support local communities, wildlife, and the planet. Give to EcoViva today to join in this important effort.

Watch our video to learn why we protect mangroves
www.ecoviva.org/mangroves

Women’s group releases 50,000 baby sea turtles

The 2017-2018 nesting season was a tremendous year for sea turtles: more females arrived on the Salvadoran coast to lay their eggs than had been seen in decades. Nearly ten years after El Salvador banned the sale of sea turtle products, we may be starting to see the benefits of this landmark legislation for threatened wildlife.

EcoViva began a partnership with AMBAS, the Women’s Association of Barra de Santiago, in the western region of El Salvador in 2017. This enterprising grassroots organization, founded 20 years ago by Rosa Lovato, is devoted to empowering women to protect the environment and learn valuable job skills while doing it. AMBAS runs the country’s only women-led sea turtle conservation hatchery.

With support from Lush Cosmetics, the women of AMBAS rescued and released over 50,000 sea turtle hatchlings this season, employing 140 egg collectors in the process. Sea turtle egg hatcheries all along the coast, overwhelmed by the influx of eggs coming in as a result of record-breaking nesting activity, were forced to stop accepting eggs early on in the season after running out of government funds to compensate collectors. By contrast, AMBAS kept its doors open for several more months thanks to its partnership with Lush and EcoViva, saving hundreds of sea turtle nests from the black market.

We’re expecting high nesting rates again this season. Yet public funds for local conservation efforts are drying up. Now is a crucial time for EcoViva to step in raise the money needed to keep hatcheries running – not only to protect endangered sea turtle species, but to ensure the livelihoods of the hundreds of people in El Salvador helping protect them.

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Photos: Ana Luisa Ahern
Bay Area artists Lauren Elder and Cristian Muñoz spent the month of April in the Lower Lempa working with our partners to design and paint three public murals. The colorful works showcase moving histories of communities and families who survived war and natural disaster and rebuilt their lives. This project was made possible by the generous support of donors who recognized the power of art to honor and inspire.

For over a year the high salinity of local well water has forced the community of Isla Montecristo to bring its drinking water from a neighboring town. Our Salvadoran partners are collaborating with U.S. engineers to build crucial water infrastructure and restore potable water access: in May residents and eight volunteers from Iowa installed a solar-powered water pump, which will eventually connect to a new well and pipe system.

May saw another milestone for our partners: community media station Mangrove Radio celebrated 15 years of delivering news and entertainment to thousands of listeners in the Lower Lempa and beyond. The radio has trained and employed numerous youth presenters, equipping young people with valuable technical skills and a creative outlet through which to engage their communities.

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*a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters.*

Pope Francis also draws connections between social and economic justice, climate change, and the emerging water crisis.

Today’s struggles for the human right to water and environmental stewardship echo Romero’s legacy and Francis’s words. Those most impacted by environmental degradation and climate change and their allies are rising up to demand that governments, corporations, and other powerful interests do the right thing.

In 2017, after years of a grassroots-led struggle, El Salvador became the first country in the world to ban metallic mining. People endured violence and death threats by company-sponsored thugs, mobilizing until the legislature recognized that water is more valuable than gold.

**The next step would be to pass a national law to enshrine the human right to water.** El Salvador is under severe water stress. The country has experienced droughts in recent years, and most of its surface water is polluted. The lack of a coherent water law has led to a hodgepodge of regulations, opening the door to abuse and leaving people in poor communities without reliable access to clean water.

The new Legislative Assembly is instead attempting to pass a regressive law that would hand regulatory responsibility to business interests and usher in the privatization of water. Our partners have vowed to fight the commodification of this life-sustaining resource and we are proud to stand with them.

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**The Legacy of Saint Romero: Water & Environmental Justice in El Salvador, October 12-20**

Meet activists who outlawed mining, defend water, and labor everyday to protect their ecosystems and communities. We will also join in local festivities for the canonization of Saint Romero.

*Contact us at travel@ecoviva.org or (510) 835-1334 to join.*
TRAVEL WITH US
We’re organizing a trip to El Salvador October 12-20 and we want you there! Meet activists defending water from privatization, boat through the mangroves, and join once-in-a-lifetime celebrations for the canonization of Oscar Romero.
Contact us at travel@ecoviva.org or (510) 835-1334 to join.

DOUBLE YOUR INVESTMENT
All donations made this summer will be matched up to $20,000 by The Rose Foundation and members of our board. Your donation is an investment in innovative, locally-led solutions to poverty and climate change.
Make a gift today with the enclosed envelope or on our secure online donation page:
www.donate.ecoviva.org