



Team Summary by Brianne Davis, team member of a June 2009  
*Thrivent Builds Worldwide* team led by Craig Chapello

Finding the words to describe our amazing trip will not be easy, but we are all so glad for the experiences we had and the relationships we built in El Salvador. Our group is from the suburbs of Chicago; we came on the trip eager to serve and experience the culture of El Salvador. We were lucky enough to be volunteering with Jody's group from Nebraska that has been to El Salvador several times! We were incredibly impressed with how well our work days, excursions, meals, and cultural activities were organized! This allowed us to feel safe and focus on what was truly important- building homes, hope, and relationships.

Before coming to El Salvador, we thought the focus of the trip would be on building homes. After our first day of work, we learned our trip was going to be about so much more than our hard work building homes. Each day after the devotional, the volunteers counted off to see what group we would be in for the day and the kind of work we would be doing. This allowed us to try a variety of jobs and mix up the volunteers, masons, and other workers. We communicated with the masons, workers, family representatives, and Villa Esperanza community members in any way possible (pointing, facial expressions, hand gestures, random Spanish phrases, and more fluent Spanish). We were encouraged by the Habitat for Humanity leaders to get to know one another, while continuing to work hard to finish our goals in building for each day. While some of the work was more physically demanding like digging, mixing concrete, and clearing fields, other work was less physically demanding like painting, tiling, and putting chispa into bricks. There was always a job for everyone and we switched out whenever people were tired.

My most memorable and favorite parts of the trip were the community and cultural activities. I think the masons and workers' favorite part of the week was the soccer game with mixed teams of volunteers and Salvadorans. I am proud to say that my team won and the soccer players really got to show off their skills! After the game, we returned to Villa Esperanza for an amazing fiesta that included piñatas, great Salvadoran food (including pupusas we helped make), music, and a birthday celebration for Christine, one of the volunteers from our group! We even danced with some of masons to salsa songs. There were so many children from the community that came to the fiesta and interacted with all of us.

Friday was a day full of mixed feelings-it was our last day of work, but we had another awesome cultural sharing activity. In the morning, several of the volunteers and I did the morning devotional. It was amazing to share our feelings and praises with the masons, workers, other volunteers, Christina Perez, Juan Jose, and Luis Fernando. In the afternoon during the cultural activity, our Nebraska and Chicago groups sang, "Lord I Lift Your Name on High," "Ain't No Mountain High Enough," and "Kumbaya My Lord." During "Kumbaya My Lord," all of the volunteers, workers, and masons came up to join our circle. It was one of those "aha moments" that made our world seem so small and so connected, just writing this brings tears to my eyes. After this touching moment, a mariachi band surprised us and there was more dancing and more fun with all of our friends!

Everyone was so welcoming, so kind, and so fun. A wonderful Salvadoran couple getting married at the Hotel Sahara even invited us to their wedding and treated us like prized guests. I seriously miss the people of El Salvador and their warmth so much since returning home to the states.

