

Epiphany4, Year C
The Rev. Martha L. Hubbard

January 31, 2010
St. Paul's, Newburyport, MA

It is so good to be back among you after being in El Salvador! We had a truly remarkable time there. There are so many stories to tell and pictures to show and discussions to have about the shape our partnership could take there. But that is all in due time. Thank you for your prayers and support. They meant so much.

While we were there, you all were also in my prayers. I particularly had in mind your discussions about our annual budget. I left with full confidence that you would have those conversations in a faithful and honest way and from what I have heard since being back that is what happened. I know that emotions have run high about the possibility that we would reduce some staff positions. I know that there are many ideas about how we should go forward, and I know that all those ideas do not fit neatly and easily together. This immediate financial challenge that confronts us makes us ask deeper questions about who we are, what our priorities are, and how those priorities fit with God's mission in the world. These are important and substantive issues, that demand our attention and

best efforts. In the face of them I am certain of one thing - God is with us all in those challenges, and God provides all that we need to meet them.

I say this, just having witnessed that truth in El Salvador: The depth of faith that our Anglican sisters and brothers live out there each day was breath-taking to us. Please, over the next weeks and months ask Sue, Trudi, Joyce, Carole, Pam, Lydia, Lisa and Beverly what signs they saw of Christ alive and active in El Salvador through the Anglican Church there. We are all just bursting to tell you.

I personally got a chance to practice, in a very small way, the kind of faith and trust that the Salvadoran Church shows each day in much larger ways. This small chance came to me the afternoon of the second Sunday we were there, the day before we left to return to you. It was our second worship service of the day. When we arrived at the Church of the Holy Trinity in the town of St. Martin, the young deacon who oversees the parish, named Juan Pablo, came out to greet us. Most Sundays the priest from St. Mary's, where we had been in the morning, goes to Holy Trinity of celebrate communion. But that afternoon something had come up at the last minute that kept him from being there.

So deacon Juan Pablo asked how my Spanish was. I balked! Surely he could not be thinking that I would lead the service in Spanish! But that was just what he was thinking. I protested that my Spanish was very slim -muy, muy, muy pocito!! He countered that all I would have to do was read the Spanish words out of the prayerbook. Then he added - *“that way the people will have Eucharist.”* I think in that moment I heard God laughing!! I perceived that God was calling me to step outside my comfort zone. So I did. I agreed.

Thankfully, Jaun Pablo led the Liturgy of the Word and preached the sermon. I offered the closing collect after the prayers of the people and pronounced the absolution after the confession. I became a bit less panicked when those two things went OK, even though the Spanish falling from my lips was slow and sometimes halting.

Then we got to the liturgy of the table. Juan Pablo set the table and as he did that I looked imploringly to the crucifix behind the altar, silently pleading, *“Lord, get me out of this!”* I am sure I heard him answer, *“Don’t worry I’ve got your back!!”* And so there was nothing to do but begin. I said the first line and the people responded. Then I said the second and the people responded again. And so on. And no one laughed, and about half

way through our magnificent prayerbook liturgy I really began to relax and to feel great joy – though I often got tongue tied. And what I realized when I raised up the bread and the cup at the end of the prayer was that this was not about me. My discomfort and fear did not matter one iota in that moment. In that moment I realized this was about us – together in the church doing what the church has done for generations so that we might be fed with the body of Christ and become the body of Christ for the world.