

Mission of help

Town of Barton couple returns to El Salvador as emissaries of their faith

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When David and Nancy Slinde began going to El Salvador they didn't think it would result in them becoming missionaries.

More than four years later and 14 trips under their belt, the town of Barton couple have used their skills in a variety of ways that just keep on expanding.

"Each aspect is so exciting," said Nancy Slinde.

When they leave Monday for a 30-day stay, they will monitor local elections, implement two projects for their respective Rotary clubs, explore agricultural partnerships, serve as educators, and continue to develop a tapestry of professional and personal relationships.

All of this is a prelude to their return to El Salvador in about four months for a two-year stay as missionaries. Those details are still being finalized.

They will rely on their occupational training, their faith, their people skills and each other.

He was a project planner for many years and she was the director of continuing education at the University of Wisconsin-Washington County as well as volunteering for many community organizations.

"We go from where people are struggling with broken tools to a country club with a brand new John Deere tractor," David Slinde said of the disparity.

Their packing abilities are being fully utilized - they're bringing along their own bedding and will sleep on inflatable mattresses. They will stay in La Granja, part of a cluster of communities with 3,500 residents 45 miles northwest of the capital San Salvador.

Their connection to the country and its people began when their church, Our Savior's Lutheran in West Bend, was looking for another way of doing missions rather than just contributing to missionaries over the world. The church decided on developing their own connection in El Salvador. Given some options, they chose the church in La Granja, which like Our Saviors has a female pastor. "The Lutheran Church of El Salvador said we would like you to come down as election observers as well," David Slinde said.

That was in 2004 when the World Council of Churches requested election observers from local churches and the workers were certified by the El Salvador government. Their work in 2004 led to their answering the call to also monitor the 2009 elections of the country wracked by civil war in the 1980s.



Submitted photo

Nancy Slinde presents books for mothers and children to Juanita Cruz, a community leader in La Granja. A lifelong educator and an active volunteer in West Bend, Nancy and her husband David Slinde will begin a two-year missionary experience later this year in El Salvador.

Their connection with La Granja led them to ask their two West Bend Rotary clubs to partner with the San Salvador club on a clean-water project. He is a member of the Noon Club and she belongs to the Sunrise Club. "The children get sick and die from the lack of clean water," David Slinde said.

After a feasibility study, the West Bend Noon Rotary Club is donating \$60,000 for phase one and two of the sanitary sewer and water project. West Bend Sunrise has pledged \$10,000 toward phase three. Engineers Without Borders has helped with the study, the bishop of El Salvador encourages local participation and the department (like our county) in which La Granja lies donates equipment, but the biggest partner is the Club Rotario in El Salvador, which donates volunteers and engineering work, David Slinde said. "If we had to pay everybody, it would cost \$700,000, and we're paying \$60,000, which is just the cost of the material," he said. The West Bend Sunrise Rotary has also contributed \$2,000 to start repairing roofs in the rainy region.

Nancy Slinde said they hope the money will repair holes in 30 homes with community residents and volunteers doing the work.

While in La Granja, Nancy Slinde will put her education in education to good use. With a bachelor's in elementary education, she will help the elementary school of 500 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Holy Angels Catholic School in West Bend has raised \$1,000 to purchase textbooks for the local school in which a teacher has one text and reads it to 30 students, she said. She also said she wants to work with the women to be literate and then develop sustainable, practical skills such as child care and agriculture. "I'm looking forward to being more immersed with the people and continuing to grow relationships, too," she said.

When placed later this year by Volunteer Missionary Movement USA, headquartered in Greendale, they will stay in a two-room, probably mud-brick house provided by the yet-to-be-determined community. It will have one socket and cooking will be done outside.

With their many irons already in the fire, the upcoming trip will put an emphasis on their time management skills, but that doesn't take away from the excitement of it all. "I'm 65 years old. This is the best time of my life," David Slinde said. "You're bumping into candidates who will lead their country. The people in the countryside are excited to see us." He said he is especially looking forward to developing business plans in the next two years to improve the El Salvadorans' livelihoods. They are among the poorest in Central America, with a high violent crime rate, he said.

He has talked with Growing Power, a nonprofit organization founded by Will Allen that uses greenhouses on 55th and Silver Spring Road in Milwaukee as a demonstration of high-density, high-productivity and low-input growing systems (www.growingpower.com). At this point, David Slinde said he has to do a feasibility study on how this would take shape in El Salvador, but he emphasized that whatever it would be must be sustainable. Jay Salinas, co-director of Growing Power, said he looks forward to seeing how David Slinde's work takes shape. Nancy Slinde said they hope to provide opportunities in the densely populated country.

"With sustainable projects and sustainable education, hopefully we will be improving life for many," she said. The couple continue to model being life-long learners.

They trained in May at VMM and will go through at least six weeks of Spanish language immersion in El Salvador when they begin their two-year missionary stay. Julia Pagenkopf, VMM's executive director, said that the Slindes' skills and personalities make them ideally suited as missionaries as they work with VMM's partners in business planning and education. "They are such wonderful people who will make so many friendships," Pagenkopf said. "They're very spiritual. They're very mission-oriented. They have great feelings for the poor and the marginalized." "You have to be patient, very relaxed, very humble and you certainly have to be open to new ideas," she said of missionaries. While the Slindes will give a great deal of themselves, they will return with the gift of many friendships and greater understanding of the people they serve, and will be able to share that with their friends and family here, Pagenkopf said.

The Slindes have already done a farewell tour of sorts, visiting their four adult children in Wisconsin, Georgia and Pennsylvania. They're giving away their cars to their kids and will have a house sitter. Nancy Slinde said she expects the length of the mission trip to be the hardest part as they're expected to not leave the country at all the first year. The journal writer of the two, she said they will have access to e-mail when in the city and will maintain a blog. "It'll be very rewarding for us personally, spiritually and professionally," she said.

Partners in help

The organizations with which David and Nancy Slinde have partnered with in their travels to El Salvador include:

Volunteer Missionary Move-ment USA: <http://www.vmmusa.org/>

Rotary International: <http://www.rotary.org/>

The Lutheran Church of El Salvador: [http://www.partners/
withelsalvador.org/](http://www.partners/withelsalvador.org/)

Engineers Without Borders: <http://www.ewb-usa.org/>

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