

FOSTERING A WEB OF CONNECTIONS: CENTRAL AMERICA

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When the Rt. Rev. Susan Goff, bishop suffragan, was in seventh grade, she had to decide a language to study. At that moment she chose Spanish, a decision which would steer her ministry as a bishop and weave a web of connections. “My 12-year-old self knew something about what I wanted and about what actually emerged,” said Goff.

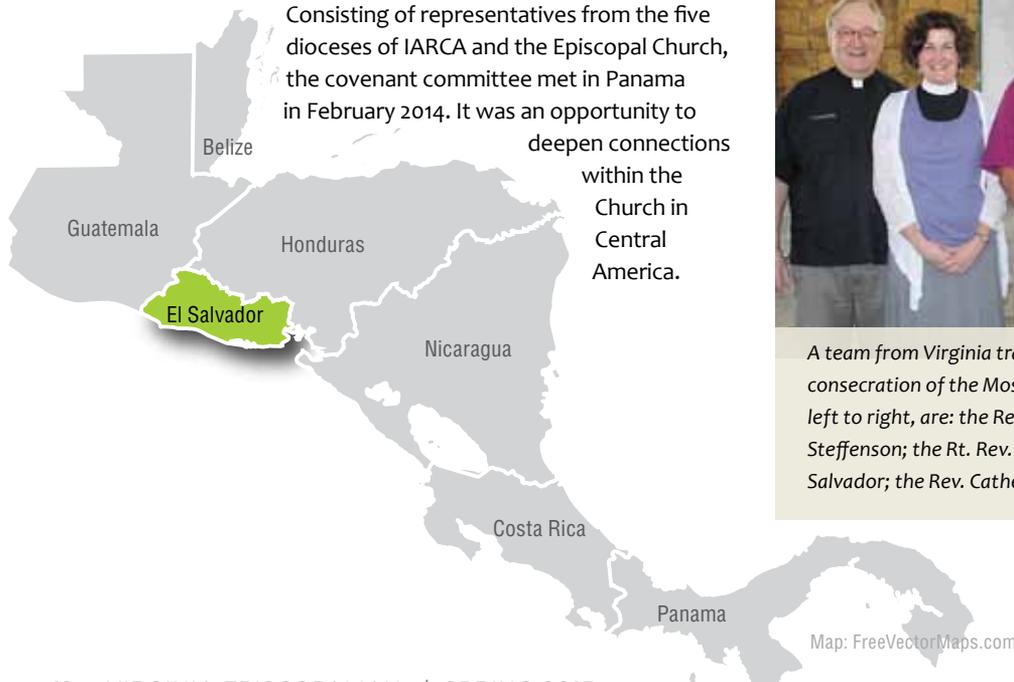
After studying academic Spanish through high school and college, Goff realized she couldn’t communicate conversationally with the Spanish-speaking community around her. Not only did she have a desire to speak to people about the Church, but also share joy and laughter.

From that desire emerged a determination, and during a sabbatical in 2008, Goff and her husband, the Rev. Tom Holliday, flew to Guatemala for a six-week Spanish immersion course. The experience led to connections with the local people, street vendors and their children. More recently, those connections have continued to spread through a relationship with the bishop of Guatemala, the Most Rev. Armando Guerra Soria, and a member of the Diocese of Virginia, Greg Lowden. Lowden is the founder of Iniciativa, a non-profit organization with the goal to provide opportunities for at-risk youth.

Today, Iniciativa not only has support from a number of churches in the Diocese of Virginia, but is also building relationships with the Episcopal Church in Guatemala.

Goff’s role in facilitating connections in Central America has not gone unnoticed. In 2013, the House of Bishops appointed her to serve as a member of the covenant committee for La Iglesia Anglicana de la Region Central de America (IARCA).

Consisting of representatives from the five dioceses of IARCA and the Episcopal Church, the covenant committee met in Panama in February 2014. It was an opportunity to deepen connections within the Church in Central America.



So when the time came in January 2015 for the consecration of the Diocese of El Salvador’s newly elected bishop, the Rt. Rev. Juan David Alvarado, Goff viewed it as an opportunity to enhance relationships with the IARCA bishops. The connections multiplied when three representatives from the Diocese of Virginia accompanied her. The Rev. Catherine Hicks is vicar of La Iglesia de San Jose and La Iglesia de Cristo Rey in Arlington; the Rev. Bernie Schroeder is interim rector of St. Patrick’s, Falls Church; and the Rev. Leslie Nunez Steffensen is assistant at Grace, Alexandria, which also hosts a Spanish-speaking congregation. “I’m now hoping to connect La Gracia congregation to feel the ministry in El Salvador,” said Steffensen.

As Goff explained, the trip was not only about “connecting me with IARCA or me with another bishop in Central America, but our Latino congregations, some of whom are predominantly Salvadoran, with the Church in El Salvador.”

After learning Spanish, building relationships in Guatemala and making connections with El Salvador, Goff’s role as a facilitator of connections in Central America is only just beginning. “I see my role as using my voice as bishop to hold up those relationships in front of the whole Church, and to keep naming them, and to call us to acts of justice, acts of hospitality, acts of love – all of those things God calls us to do,” said Goff. +



A team from Virginia traveled to El Salvador to celebrate the consecration of the Most Rev. Armando Guerra Soria. Pictured, left to right, are: the Rev. Bernie Schroeder; the Rev. Leslie Nunez Steffensen; the Rt. Rev. David Alvarado, second bishop of El Salvador; the Rev. Catherine Campbell; and the Rt. Rev. Susan Goff.