

EL SALVADORIAN COMMUNITY IN NORTH TEXAS

QUICK OBSERVATIONS

Country/region of origin	El Salvador
Population (community leaders)	80,000
Population (Census 20000)	26,271
Main reasons for migration	Economic hardship, political instability, political oppression, refugees from war
Years in this region	10-20 years
Primary areas of residence	Widespread
General level of education	Some high school
Employment	Restaurant, housekeeping, construction, manufacturing, hotel
Principal religions	Catholic, Protestant
Languages	Spanish
Media (newspaper or radio)	None
Community newsletter	None
Cultural organizations	2, plus many soccer teams

Spread across the northern half of the DFW Metropolis, an estimated 80,000 Salvadorians have found a safe haven from the political oppression, massacres and violence that devastated their country. Between 1978 and 1992 the U.S. government propped up military dictators who erased villages and convulsed the nation in violence and war. Most Salvadorian immigrants over the age of 30 fled the scorched earth policy of the Salvadorian dictatorships during the years of the civil war. Many still live with the memories of family members being taken away during the night.

More recently, economic hardship, drought, shortage of employment opportunities and natural disasters have driven thousands of additional young men and some women (and even unaccompanied teenagers) to flee to El Norte (The North). Today, 14% of the Salvadorian population resides in the United States.

The current cost for passage to Dallas—a dangerous and uncertain voyage that may bring death or failure — is approximately \$7,000. Approximately 30-40% of the Salvadorian population in the Metropolis is undocumented. There are few elderly or over-55-year-olds in the region, because the challenge of making the trip is considerable and the economic benefit for that age is diminished.

Poorly educated and lacking English skills, most Salvadorians begin their new lives working as busboys in restaurants. The area's many Mexican and ethnic restaurants, groceries, seafood/meat markets rely on the cheap and compliant labor of countless thousands of undocumented Salvadorians and other Latinos, who accept substandard conditions without complaint as they pay off the *coyotes* who guided them to the Metropolis. Hotels, factories and construction are additional possibilities for employment.

In spite of their entry-level jobs, Salvadorians sent home \$1.75 billion in remittances in 2002 (The Economist, January 4, 2003).

Fear of imprisonment and deportation by the INS (La Migra) keeps many Salvadorian immigrants living in isolation, afraid to participate in large public events or to attend cultural activities such as the Independence Day Celebration held in a local park. Until recently, many did not enroll their children in school for fear that any official record would result in their deportation.

The overwhelming need of this community is the legalization of their status. They maintain hope that the TPS (Temporary Protected Status) ruling will result in their favor, a hope exacerbated by the federal government's tightening of restrictions on immigration in the wake of the September 11, attack. TPS grants persons from designated countries the ability to remain in the U.S. and also to obtain authorization to work. The purpose of TPS is to provide a safe haven in cases of natural disaster, civil war and similar crisis

situations. To be eligible, individuals must have resided in the U.S. continuously since February 13, 2001, and have been physically present continually since March 9, 2001.

The long hours spent at several jobs that are required to pay off their *coyotes* and support their families back home have left Salvadorian immigrants with little time to study English. Finding jobs remains a challenge for the undocumented in the current economic downturn.

OTHER SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Age distribution	Primarily young adults and middle-aged
Percentage of men and women	65% men, 35% women
Ties to country of origin	Close relatives remain, send money back regularly
Frequency of travel to country of origin	Some travel often (primarily those with legal status) and some do not
Estimate of undocumented	30-40%

Material source: DFW International
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OUTREACH STRATEGIES

Start occupational gatherings, i.e. Nanny Associations, meet for bible study at their place of work, after or before hours. Sports are very important as well as free legal clinics remembering to protect anonymity.
Offer ESL classes at work sites, even on lunch breaks
Soccer clinics

HOW DO YOU OPEN THE DOOR TO CONVERSATIONS ABOUT FAITH?

Share your everyday relationship with God...answered prayers, Scriptures that comfort
Ask about how needs are met through their faith...loneliness, courage, direction
Offer to pray for their needs
Give books/videos that tell a faith story
Discover their interests and find Christians in that field to share their story
Look for Bible stories or principles that teach a value they respect