

# A Horrific Slaughter That Must Never Be Forgotten

El Mozote is hidden in the countryside of El Salvador.

In 1981, this small village became the site of a horrific massacre. As a tactical move by the army during the country's civil war, approximately 1,000 innocent village residents were slaughtered.

Thirty-six years later, I visited El Mozote with my Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond class and heard the story of what happened over that three-day period in 1981.

With a painful resignation, our guide recalled what had happened when an army, trained by U.S. soldiers, came in with the mission to leave no one alive.

On a sunny day this past January, a dusty blue sign within the town limits of El Mozote signaled we had arrived at the historic spot.

In the town square, there was a brightly painted blue and white church. Small businesses and square houses lined the main road.

Smiling children played around the street vendor carts, and a group of residents held a meeting by the steps of the church.

Despite the signs of life in El Mozote, there was a quietness hovering in the air.

Our town guide motioned for us to join her at a memorial beside the church.

As she began to tell us about the town being tricked into thinking that the Red Cross was coming to deliver food and supplies before the massacre, my eyes locked in on the plaques behind her with the victims' ages and names.

I saw the names of babies, teenagers and elderly adults. They were all people who

were not fighting in the war or harboring weapons. They were innocent people who were convinced that help was coming.

Instead of receiving aid, families were separated and methodically murdered by the army.

Men were taken to a house in town. Children were separated from their mothers and placed in the church.

Young girls were taken to a separate location and raped before being killed. Women were lined up near the woods to await their death.

After hearing the story, our group was led down a dirt road, littered with the homes that still have the wounds of bullet holes.

As the guide opened up a wired gate on the side of the road for us to enter, the cries from the birds in the trees rang in my ears and sounded almost as if they were the screams of villagers.

We quietly stared into a vacant hole where a house once stood, as the guide's story continued. In this place where we stood, women were brutally executed.

We were also shown a nearby tree where one woman, the sole survivor, hid in horror from the army.

She had been forced to drop the baby she was holding before the soldiers took her away. When she saw her chance to run, she did.

We were told that she later hid her head in a hole in the ground and screamed, unable to process what she had just experienced.

She did not try to save the child she was holding because she knew she had to survive. She knew she had to tell others about what had occurred. She knew she must be a witness.

We ended our time in El Mozote that day at the children's garden beside the

church.

On the wall of the church, all of the children's names and ages were printed. Above their names are brightly colored mosaics of butterflies and children.

Standing by the church and reading the ages of the children who were murdered by being thrown in the air onto swords made me physically ill.

As a mother of a young child, my heart broke for the parents who witnessed their children being murdered.

My heart broke for the children who spent their last moments in terror. My heart broke for a town forever touched by trauma.

I could not help but wonder why people returned to El Mozote. Why did they restore the church? Why would they want to live where so much heartache and destruction occurred?

After some thought, I realized they returned because what happened in 1981 should never be forgotten.

The sole survivor knew the story must be told so evil could not prevail. The innocent lives deserve to be honored and remembered, and so they returned and continue to bear witness to what occurred.

As painful as it is to hear this story, I feel as if the residents of El Mozote would want you to know what happened.

As martyred Archbishop Oscar Romero once said, "There are many things that can only be seen through eyes that have cried."

May we remove our blinders so we may truly see the suffering in our world.

*[Cadance Tyler](#) is the director of youth at Randolph Memorial Baptist Church in Madison Heights, Virginia, and a student at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. She lives in Appomattox, Virginia, with her husband and son.*

**<https://ethicsdaily.com/a-horrific-slaughter-that-must-never-be-forgotten-cms-24693/> February 28, 2018 Cadance Tyler**

*Editor's note: This article is part of a series of reflections on the B TSR Mission Immersion Experience to El Salvador in January 2018. Previous articles in the series are:*

[How U.S. Exports Violence into Heart of El Salvador](#) by Joseph Furio

[U.S. Decision Leaves Salvadorans 'Running for Their Lives'](#) by Sue Smith