

El Salvador



Exchange

By Tyler MacAfee, AMM Director of Policy & Communications

As a municipal official you know the challenges facing your community. And if you have ever attended an AMM event you have a pretty good idea of the challenges facing other communities in Manitoba. You may have even had the opportunity to attend national conferences where you've learned about some of the challenges facing other communities across Canada. At the AMM, we have been lucky enough to take this one step further and learn the challenges facing communities on the international level.

Over the last few years the AMM has been participating in a Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) sponsored exchange with the municipal association from El Salvador – The Corporation of Municipalities of the Republic of El Salvador (COMURES). Located in Central America, El Salvador is the smallest and most densely populated country in the region. In fact, El Salvador is roughly a sixth of the size of Manitoba, yet has six times the population. El Salvador has a national government and is divided into 267 municipal governments.


The exchange began in 2005 when a delegation from El Salvador attended an FCM meeting and became aware of AMM.

COMURES requested an exchange be set up with AMM and, in 2006, a group of elected officials and staff from their association came to Manitoba. This was followed up with a group from AMM visiting El Salvador in 2007 to set up the work plan for the exchange.

From March 30 to April 4 of this year, the technical phase of the exchange began with a group of five COMURES representatives visiting Manitoba. The aim of this phase of the mission was to gain a better understanding of how AMM communicates with our membership as well as with the general public. COMURES was also very interested in how AMM works with government, and was pleased to have the opportunity to spend a day at the Provincial Legislature to meet the Honourable **Steve Ashton**, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and get an overview from the department on how they work with the AMM.

While much of the mission is designed for COMURES to learn about how municipal government works in Canada and Manitoba, there has been plenty of opportunity for AMM to learn, as well. While often we have preconceived notions of what life is like in Central America, it was evident from

the exchange that El Salvador is a thriving country. El Salvador has emerged from the difficult civil war of the 1980s to become a stable multi-party presidential system, evidenced by their recent presidential elections. COMURES is an extremely professional organization, and is a strong national advocate for municipalities. In fact, through recent lobbying efforts COMURES has been successful in getting municipalities 7% of the national budget, and are working on getting to 10%. COMURES also works closely with its members in providing training and educational opportunities.

While municipalities in El Salvador face many challenges, ranging from natural disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes to rampant crime and the impacts from the global economic slowdown, they continue to work to make their country better. And COMURES, as the umbrella group, is actively trying to find ways to improve how they do business. Much was gained from their week with AMM and the next stage of the exchange will be AMM visiting El Salvador to share some of AMM's best practices with the COMURES membership. No doubt, the AMM will learn much along the way. 



The visitors present a gift to Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs Steve Ashton.

Did you know...

For municipal elections in El Salvador the individual running for mayor names his council?

When the nomination period begins, the mayoral candidate publically names and registers who will be on his council. There is no election for individual councilors, only for mayor. If the candidate wins, his whole team becomes the council.

Party politics is a big part of municipal government in El Salvador?

Every mayor running in a municipal election is linked to one of the national political parties. However what is really interesting is that often a mayor will include individuals who are members of other political parties on their team. This helps get a broader coalition of support in an election.

COMURES, in turn, divides its board positions based on the level of support received by each political party in the last legislative election.

El Salvador Facts

Total Area:	21,040 sq km
Population:	7,185,218 (July 2009 est.)
Urbanization:	<i>urban population:</i> 61% of total population (2008) <i>rate of urbanization:</i> 1.9% annual rate of change (2005-10 est.)
Independence:	September 15 th , 1821 from Spain - September 15 th is Independence Day, a national holiday
Constitution:	December 20 th , 1983
Industries:	food processing, beverages, petroleum, chemicals, fertilizer, textiles, furniture, light metals
Agriculture:	coffee, sugar, corn, rice, beans, oilseed, cotton, sorghum, beef, dairy products

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Delegates from COMURES visit the AMM office on April 3, 2009. The Group consisted of Mayor Dany Rodriguez, City of Zaragoza; Mayor Elsa Guevara de Melchor, Municipality of Santa Maria Ostuma, Bessy Torres, Communications Advisor, Margarita Alfaro, Coordinator of Communications and Interinstitutional Relations, Carlos Pinto, Executive Director, and Michelle Caron, Regional Coordinator, Latin America, FCM.

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