



DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI CIRCLE AWARD RECIPIENT



MELISSA BLYTHE ALTMAN '02

Lay Missioner in El Salvador
Maryknoll Lay Missioners

Melissa Blythe Altman '02 provides direct service to the poor and marginalized people of El Salvador in her role as a Maryknoll Lay Missioner.

Currently Ms. Altman works in a women's cooperative that makes clothing, embroidered goods and other sewn items. Her function is to animate the women, provide support and guidance, and assist with daily operations.

"I am inspired daily by the Salvadoran people with whom I live and work. No matter how terrible things may seem, they always have hope," she said. "I am inspired and humbled by their generosity. The women I work with make less than \$200 a month, and with so little money, they always share what they have with those around them. It is an important lesson for me to think more about my community and less about myself."

Ms. Altman's work with Maryknoll Lay Missioners began in 2013. With less than a year of Spanish study, she and her family moved to a small, semi-rural town roughly 45 minutes from San Salvador, the capital city of El Salvador. The Altmans' first ministry focused on developing a program for local children to grow and express themselves through art, reading and recreation.

Previously Ms. Altman was a Lasallian volunteer and the director of campus ministry at Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School in Brooklyn, N.Y. These experiences, she said, helped her to internalize the tenets of Catholic social teaching and influenced her decision to live in solidarity with the poor.

At La Roche College Ms. Altman earned a bachelor's degree in communication, served as president of the Student Government Association and was an active member of campus ministry. She was the recipient of the President's Award for Leadership and Scholarship, the most prestigious award an undergraduate student can receive at La Roche.

"During my time at La Roche, I became friends with many of the international students. Learning about their cultures, their beliefs and their childhoods gave me insight into their struggles as immigrants and the beauty of their cultures," she said. "This was one way in which La Roche expanded my worldview and inspired me to try to make a difference."

