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Continuing Coverage of SOA/Ignatian Family Teach-In

James Roberts | Nov. 22, 2008

I made my first trip to the annual School of the Americas Watch protest and Ignatian Solidarity Network's Family Teach-In two years ago.

(The school was officially renamed the Western Hemispheric Institute for Security Cooperation, but is still commonly referred to as the S.O.A. by participants in this event). I'd been aware of the event from my faith community when I was younger, and I'd read about the protest's most recognizable leader, Fr. Roy Bourgeois, in the pages of NCR and elsewhere as I got older. However, I realized quickly upon arriving in 2006, that the weekend had become something more than the profound act of remembrance carried out at the gates of Ft. Benning, Georgia. The event brought together all ages from all corners of the U.S. (and several other countries). It was a gathering of the Catholic community old and new - all in the name of justice, education, and service. I can still recall vividly moments from that weekend.

Last year, I was unable to attend. So when presented with the chance to go this year, as well as lead two of the Teach-In's break out sessions, I jumped at the opportunity.

Over the next two days, I will be offering my experience on this page. I'll be posting written thoughts and encounters, photos from the weekend's events, as well as preparing a video or two. My goal is to capture as much of the event's diversity, energy, and call to service as possible. Most intriguing, I think, will be to find out why this event, now nearly two decades removed from the tragedy that inspired it, continues to grow. What's drawing people, a huge percentage of which are in high school or college, to this place? At the same time, I'll be asking what it is participants intend to leave with - why come if not to return with something to practice, something to share? It's their story I hope to present here. Those who boarded buses in Tacoma or shared the drive with a classmate from Omaha.

Two years ago, I was floored by the excitement and spirit I encountered at this event. Now, as I sit just a few feet from the stream of guests pouring into the convention center, I can't wait to hear what they have to say.

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