

They're going south for winter --south to help in El Salvador

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WELLINGTON - Speak of spending retirement winters in the south and most people immediately think of a leisurely few months at a beachside condo somewhere along the Florida coast.

Although George and Bessie Teskey are indeed heading south for the winter, they're not going anywhere near Florida, nor will they be living in beachside luxury. And their days will be far from leisurely.

Instead, the Teskeys are returning to El Salvador, unable to resist the beckoning call of the troubled Central American country that has almost become their second home.

But the Teskeys have more on their minds than idyllic pleasure. Their aim is to help people -- especially children -- who have been the victims of violence in the strife-torn country.

Bessie is an old hand at living in El Salvador, having spent the best part of the last 18 months working in three orphanages caring for children whose parents were killed in violence, or who were abandoned at one of the many refugee camps which dot the countryside.

Her last four months were spent at a facility built by Americans in honor

of Oscar Romero, the archbishop of El Salvador killed by the military while celebrating Mass.

George has been back and forth visiting his wife -- once a surprise trip to celebrate their anniversary -- but always had to return to his job as a stationary engineer at the nearby Campbell Soup mushroom plant.

But retirement comes in less than two months and without much of a break in between, the Teskeys head south in a van specially equipped to serve their requirements in their latest endeavour.

Rather than tie themselves to one particular location, the Teskeys hope to establish a mobile clinic in conjunction with the work of a Jesuit priest. Loaded with drugs, vitamins and other medical supplies, they plan to travel with a doctor and nurse to remote rural communities and refugee camps.

While they will still visit the three orphanages, their aim is to help children who don't live in the institutions -- and who are more often than not less fortunate than children who do.

Before they depart, however, the Teskeys will seek support for their work from drug companies, service clubs and church organizations.

The politics of Central America

are among the world's most turbulent and for anyone who doesn't closely monitor the situation, they appear a confusing mess. The United States supports the government of one country while less-than-covertly arms rebels attempting to overthrow the government of another.

The Reagan government backs the Salvadoran government of leader Jose Napoleon Duarte and as a result violence continues to escalate as the quiet influx of American troops proceeds in the battle against leftist guerillas.

The Teskeys don't speak much about the politics of Central America, only to say that if the American presence was to vanish, so too, would the region's problems.

The people have become inured to the daily clashes between government soldiers and the guerillas which often take their toll -- however unintentionally -- on the civilian population.

In her work, Bessie Teskey has seen the results of violence caused by ideological and religious conflict. But life goes on.

"We hear the bombs and the gunfire but just have to try and ignore the violence, to stay out of politics...to pick up the pieces."

TESKEY, George & Bessie