



HERMANAS DE LA CARIDAD  SISTERS OF CHARITY OF
DE VERBO ENCARNADO THE INCARNATE WORD

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Seeds | By Sr. Katty Huanuco CCVI and Jennifer Reyes Lay |

In a recent Statement of Solidarity, it was stated that the Congregation of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word are a congregation founded by immigrants, for immigrants. The founding call brought sisters from France to a foreign land (Texas) to serve “our Lord Jesus Christ, suffering in the multitudes...” To this day the CCVI Sisters continue to respond to the needs of those who are suffering, seeing the face of Christ in the poor, the sick, the marginalized, the immigrant, and the refugee.

Two of the CCVI sponsored ministries that serve the immigrant community are El Puente in Missouri and Visitation House in San Antonio, TX. El Puente mainly assists the Spanish speaking community in accessing important resources like health care, social services, and legal services. Visitation House offers hospitality to women and children, and through "La Casita del Saber" offers the only Spanish language GED program in the area, assisting Hispanic immigrants with advancing their education.

In addition to these sponsored ministries, other CCVI sisters collaborate with organizations outside the congregation in order to support and accompany the immigrant and refugee community. We recently asked some of our sisters who serve our immigrant and refugee brothers and sisters to share some of their reflections on this important ministry. In this special edition of Seeds, we share with you here their reflections and other articles and action items related to immigrants and refugees.

CCVI Ministry to Immigrants

El Puente Ministry – Jefferson City, MO |By Sr. Peggy Bonnot CCVI |

El Puente – Hispanic Ministry will celebrate 18 years of existence in September. We engage primarily with immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, Honduras, Chile, Peru, and Ecuador. Support Services, specifically Health Care, occupies about 80% of our work. We help pregnant moms follow their prenatal plans, providing interpretation for them as they interact with the health care system. We help them with insurance applications and other social service assistance that is available to them through the community. We also provide health education and information in Spanish by a qualified health educator. Much of this work is done in their home. We also provide transportation to medical appointments and interpretation services at hospitals, clinics and doctors’ offices for clients when requested by the individual, hospital, clinic or doctor’s office.

El Puente offers a ministry of presence and support to the communities in two parishes in our service area. We are present at the Spanish Masses, help to train ministers, work with the choir, and promote cultural experiences and celebrations. It was through attending these Spanish Masses that we first learned of the need for translation services in this area. We learned that most service providers were not bilingual. Since we could speak Spanish, even though it was at a limited ability in the beginning, people started asking for our help. So we explored all the resources in our area and started accompanying people to access the services they needed. We also help with immigration applications and court appointments when needed. There is an office of Refugee and Immigration in Jefferson City, which is part of Catholic Charities. We work closely with them on Immigration issues.

The biggest challenges in this ministry are the closed-minded attitudes of some people toward immigrants. It is very difficult to build up a sustaining donor base because of such attitudes. We are very dependent on grants, the generosity of the Congregation, and the diocese to keep our ministry going.

We have learned much from our ministry over the years. Our population is young, child-bearing age for the most part. Their children learn English quickly, but the parents struggle because of work schedules or the need to care for their other young children. Most of them work at least two jobs to be able to send money to their families back home. Most of them would prefer to be in their home countries, but because of the conditions at home they must leave or flee to support their families. They bring with them strong family values and a rich cultural heritage. Many of them have had to struggle to receive an education, leaving school at a young age to help their families. They come from countries where war, abuse, oppression and lack of income has scarred them.

Our hope, which is our Vision Statement, is that our Hispanic neighbors will thrive in church and society. Much of that hope is in the youth. They will be healthy, educated, and have leadership skills to bridge the gap between their parents and the future. Given a chance they will be very productive citizens and have a great influence on the future of our country.

El Puente Ministry – California, MO |By Sr. Guadalupe Ruiz CCVI |

I serve in California, Missouri which is a small town of 4268 residents. My ministry is through the Annunciation Parrish in collaboration with El Puente ministry based in Jefferson City, MO. I have been working here since October of 2010, so almost seven years.

I serve the Hispanic community here, which is mostly made up of Mexicans from the areas of Michoacan and Guanajuato, and also some families from Central America. Most come from small farming communities, and have immigrated to the United States in search of work and better opportunities for their families.

The biggest need is the lack of English language fluency in the older adults, and so I assist them as an interpreter, accompanying those who need translation help to doctor appointments, hospitals, lawyer visits, court appearances, and to the immigration offices.

In the parish, the most urgent need is to prepare leaders so that the community can grow and little by little become more self-sufficient. It is a slow and long process because many lack strong formal education, however their faith, inherited from their elders, is a great value that they bring with them.

One of the challenges of the immigrant communities in California is for the newest generation growing up who were born in this country. They can speak with English fluency from attending the schools, and are less fluent in the Spanish of the older generation because they prefer to speak English with their friends and classmates. They are called the “nini” generation because

they are neither (ni) from here, nor (ni) from there. That is to say they don't have the strong roots their parents brought from their country of origin but at the same time they aren't anglo and don't fully fit in here in the U.S. Their challenge is to find their identity as Hispanics born in the USA.

Daily living and accompany these simple and wonderful people I am reminded of the words of Jesus, "that which you did unto the least of these, you did unto me..." Some of the most impactful experiences I have had these past few years has been accompanying people in their legal processes, going with them to court appearances, visiting in jail, seeing them denied their freedom and even deported. It is truly a painful process to witness. Many families are separated due to convictions of having entered the country unlawfully. I have had the opportunity to get to know the judge, and he is a very humane person who cares, but who also has to comply with his duty to enforce the law. However, ensuring that the human dignity of all people is respected brings to life in me the mission of the Congregation.

During these times of uncertainty with the new laws being passed, the Hispanics I work with offer me an example of hope and faith in God. Their trust in the providence of God which will not abandon them is great. One woman told me, "If God wants me to stay, I will stay, and if God's will is that they send me back to Mexico I will go, because it will be what God wants."

I am grateful to Sr. Marinela Flores who invited me to come to this small town and serve our immigrant brothers and sisters. It has been a great opportunity, challenge, and way to make present the saving and healing love of the Incarnate Word.

Responding to the needs of the Immigrant Community | By Sr. Anne Marie Burke CCVI |

When I returned from my ministry in Peru in January of 2015 the Generalate team invited me to discern where I could best serve in the U.S. After a time of discernment, I felt that God was calling me to minister to immigrants, especially to Latin-Americans since Spanish is my second language.

From March -May, 2015 I volunteered 2-3 days per week with the IWC (Interfaith Welcome Coalition) which the First Presbyterian Church coordinated in San Antonio. I served at the Casa Mennonite guest house where immigrants from the Dilley and Karnes City detention centers came for shelter until they continued to their destination. Usually their stay was for a night or two. Hospitality, food, a place to rest, a shower, clean clothes, legal advice, health care, counseling service, transportation, communication with family and friends were offered. RAICES (Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services) collaborated in the project in a big way. The majority of the immigrants were from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico.

From March 15th to April 11th I volunteered in El Paso at the Nazareth Hospitality Center for immigrants coming from the ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) retention center in El Paso. Nazareth Hospitality Center is an extension of Annunciation House directed by Ruben Garcia. The volunteers worked on shifts: 7.00 a.m. - 2.00 p.m., 2.00.p.m. -10.00 p.m. and one volunteer stayed overnight in the center. The services offered to the immigrants were the same as in San Antonio and were more organized. The number of persons was bigger: 30 - 40 per night. People came from Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras. Mexico, Ethiopia. Most of the women had small children with them.

My experience at Nazareth Hospitality Center was a time to serve the people on their way to liberation. As I reflect on my experiences there I am aware of God's loving care of the poor and suffering manifested in the caring volunteers, and how we participate in God's redemptive love as we serve each other in solidarity. I am humbled and thank God for all His blessings in our lives and for the opportunity to receive and share His love with others.

From May to June 2016 I joined Sister Cathy Vetter in St. Louis Mo. to see what possibilities of immigrant ministry were available. Cathy gave me some contacts and I visited various institutions and spoke with Sisters from different Congregations who minister to immigrants. In my discernment I chose St. Louis because the immigrants are settled there.

I went to San Antonio for my annual Retreat and I returned to St. Louis at the end of July and joined the CCVI Lumen Christi Community. The beginning of August 2016 I started as a volunteer interpreter at the Casa de Salud clinic, and I was available for Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. I served there till March 2017.

In October, 2016 on Tuesdays and Thursdays 12.00 – 3.00 p.m. at Our Lady of Guadalupe School I started tutoring Kindergarten children who speak Spanish in their home. In April 2017 I started tutoring Monday – Friday till May 25th the last day of the school year. I will return in the middle of August when the new year begins. On Saturdays I volunteer at St. Vincent de Paul Society Caritas thrift shop sorting clothes and putting them out on the racks. The income goes to help the Food Pantry. Many immigrants come to buy at the store.

Called To Ministry To Today's Immigrants On The Southwest Us Texas-Mexico Border | By Sr. Rosaleen Harold CCVI |

"You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt." Exodus 23:9.

The seeds of my personal call to ministry among undocumented persons and refugees were sown during the general election campaign of last year. What most concerned me during the political debates was the very diverse proposals for immigration legislation among the main parties. However, on election night last January, aware of the immigration proposals of the new administration, I knew in my heart that I needed to put myself at "ground zero" to do all in my power to be an advocate for the immigrants as Scripture calls us to do: *"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me."* Matthew 25:35.

There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you." Exodus 12:49.

After consultation with our General Leadership Team, especially with Sr. Jean Durel, who has had experience in ministry on the El Paso/Juarez border, I contacted Ruben Garcia, the director of Annunciation and Casa Vides houses for refugees and was accepted as a volunteer at Casa Vides. Today I am completing my 7th week here and I can truly say that I have been blessed by my contact with the immigrants, whom we refer to as our "guests" and us volunteers as "Guest servants". We place ourselves among these poor so as transform our understanding of what constitutes more just relationships between peoples, countries, and economies. Although we work as a team, each of us bring our unique personal qualities. The basic quality for a guest servant is to have a spirit of service reflected in:

- Presence: make our heart available to each person;
- Joy: reflect the Good News with a smile;
- Sacrifice: move from a love of self to selfless love;
- Reverence: The poor are God's special people; through them we discover our own holiness.
- Hospitality: Helping the stranger feel at home. We are welcoming those who seek to belong.

Annunciation House has been working in El Paso/Ciudad Juarez since 1978 operating houses of hospitality for migrants and refugees. It is a Catholic organization that accompanies the migrant, homeless, and economically vulnerable peoples of the border region through hospitality, advocacy, and education. It has an all-volunteer staff who place themselves among these poor so as

transform their understanding of what constitutes more just relationships between peoples, countries, and economies.

VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY GATHERINGS:

On Monday mornings, we usually have a gathering of the volunteers for an all-morning prayer and reflection on specific themes related to our ministry to the refugees. We have discussed topics such as: Discipleship; Holy Women, the Sanctity of Mothers; Worldview of Abundance; Faith.

On weekdays, we begin our day each morning with prayer and reflection where we take turns preparing a specific topic. One day we reflected on our “guests” as the “Prophets Among Us”. It was a call to be open to the person who shows up at our door and what message he/she brings us. We then shared with each other the gifts we saw in each one. The team shared the following about my gifts:

“Rosaleen: You came as a prophet and your message is shown daily in your reverence for other persons. You are truly a helping person. Instead of asking “puedo ayudarlo”, you just extend your hand and reach to assist. Your attentive listening is reflected in your eyes. It is obvious that you “hear” with your heart and spirit. Your awe of simple things is expressed with quiet wonder and gratitude. I am so very glad that you are here.”

That feedback helped me to discover where I could best use my personal gifts. Usually I am the team member who has the privilege of welcoming our “guests” as they arrive from the detention center and dismount from the border patrol bus. They look tired and worried as they enter our house, but quickly they begin to feel at ease as we explain the services we offer: free room and board, contact with a family member who will buy their bus or airline ticket and transport to the bus station or the airport. We are fortunate to have a roster of local people who provide free transport for our “guests”.

BORDER AWARENESS EXPERIENCE: Understanding the US/Mexico Border through experiential education.

In the early 1990s Annunciation House developed the Border Awareness Experience (BAE). The objective of this program is to facilitate face to face meetings and encounters between participants and people and groups on both sides of the border. It intends to raise consciousness about the issues facing the border such as immigration, economic development, human rights, and social justice. The BAE also educates North Americans about our role and responsibilities in today’s globalized world.

The BAE is an immersion experience. More than being an informational tour, it seeks to immerse the participants in the border culture and realities of the many people and groups that live and work here. The food that they eat and the conditions which they live in are as much a part of the experience as the people and groups that you will meet. A typical day may include: visiting the US Border Patrol, listening to the stories of migrants and refugees, meeting with human rights activists, and staying in a migrant shelter.

Prophetic Witness

Hundreds Gather to Protest SB 4 | By Sr. Elizabeth Riebschlaeger CCVI |

On Monday, June 26th hundreds gathered in front of the US Federal Courthouse in San Antonio to protest Texas Senate Bill 4 (SB4). The Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word have publicly opposed SB 4. Present from the Congregation were Srs. Jean Durel, Marichui Bringas, Martha Ann Kirk, and Elizabeth Riebschlaeger. Also present was the Archbishop of San Antonio, Bishop Garcia-Siller. We are grateful for their prophetic witness and presence, standing in solidarity with our undocumented

sisters and brothers who seek refuge in our communities. Sr. Elizabeth wrote the following report about the experience below.

In front of US Federal Courthouse in San Antonio, hundreds gathered to protest the recently passed Texas Senate Bill 4 (SB4) signed into state law by Gov. Greg Abbot. SB 4 criminalizes the tradition of "seeking sanctuary," making cities who choose to name themselves as "sanctuary cities" subject to prosecution. Becoming a sanctuary city can include adopting policies that prevent local law enforcement from collaboration with federal officials in identification, detention and deportation of undocumented residents. SB 4 also removes the value of "sanctuary" as a protection in the presence of disputable and unjust civil laws that threaten the civil and constitutional rights of persons in residence.

San Antonio, like others in the USA, is by culture, history, tradition, and disposition a sanctuary city. Hundreds from San Antonio, Dallas, Austin, Houston and surrounding communities manifested their public endorsement for sanctuary civic policy as Federal Judge Garcia began hearing arguments in the legal challenges to SB 4 inside the Court building.

Migration in Chimbote |By IWM Selena Mitchell|

Chimbote like so many of its surrounding cities in Peru, is a collection of cultures and ethnic groups that equates to a city finding itself in the ellipses of the question: What is the culture of Chimbote? Unlike cities within the mountains whose women are identified by the top hats and colorful skirts, or the Inti Raymi festivals in Cusco, Chimbote leans towards a community of people who have brought bits of their identity with them and created a new style which can be defined as "Chimbotano," or as the locals often refer to each other as Pata Salada.

Located along the coast of Peru, Chimbote has become one of the largest cities in the Ancash region. The city is home to over 400,000 people, a large portion whom live in extreme poverty. However for many, Chimbote holds the promise of a better life: educational opportunities, and an expanded job market. Its origins date back to the early 1940s with the opening of several fish factories and later on an iron and steel plant which drew in quite a bit of income. The increase of income attracted families from the mountain sides seeking employment leading to a large migration -- movement of people to a new area or country in order to find work or better living conditions.

However, over the years the city has seen quite a bit of devastation. A terrible earthquake, overfishing of the bay, and corrupt politicians has led to social and economic difficulties. Such difficulties include low-employment, corrupt government agencies, and an underfunded educational system. To clarify, quite a few of these institutional issues are a nation wide problem and not just unique to Chimbote. Despite the economic and government difficulties, Chimbote continues to offer more opportunities than would otherwise be found in many mountain cities or villages. Thus the migration of families from the hillsides to Chimbote and Nuevo Chimbote continues.

Often when families migrate they move in parts. For instance, the father will leave first to secure a job prior to relocating the remaining family members. This often creates a division amongst close knit communities for they have to redistribute labor positions. According to an article from The Mountain Institute called "Migration from the Mountains: Peru" they write that "Two things are true about migration for mountain communities: 1) Migrants will have better access to education, jobs, and an increased access to resources. 2) When migrants leave, the division of labor in their home communities' changes." How migrant communities adapt to their new environment differs. Surrounding the cities of Chimbote and Nuevo Chimbote one can find invasiones or invasion zones, located amongst the sand dunes, inhabited by migrants. Over time as

these communities grew in size and claimed recognition by the state, these areas have received landownership rights, access to water, electricity, and schools. Though there is an unofficial designated living area, the communities acceptance by residents and the government at large reflex its complexities.

The acceptance of immigrants, those who decide to permanently reside in a foreign country and migrants, often depends upon the government's ability to support them in the form of job assistance, schooling, and housing. Chimbote strives to accommodate new inhabitants but due to social and economic difficulties a lot of the work is left up to the families. Unfortunately, there is some discrimination directed towards migrants. Derogatory words such as "cholo" and "cerrano" are sometimes used to imply that someone is uneducated and unrefined. Though there are insensitive people, the majority of Chimbotanos are welcoming and supportive of the migrant communities.

As alluded to earlier, the migration process is not always easy and varies from person to person. Age is often a factor when it comes to how quickly and effectively one adapts to their environment. As a result children who are brought up in their new community tend to stay and make roots. However, when migration does not meet the needs of the family changes have to be made. The high unemployment rates have forced many family and individuals to search for economic opportunities elsewhere, even to other countries such as Chile, Argentina, and parts of Europe. This process is called emigration: the act of leaving one's own country to permanently settle abroad or for an extended period. These family members tend to send money back to their family residing in Chimbote. It is apparent that a city's economy is often a driving factor for the movement of people be it migration or emigration. Whether community members are looking for a chance to improve their living standards or leaving to support their families from afar. This leaves cities like Chimbote in a constant state of change.

Whatever external factors that cause a family to relocate is a challenge in and of itself. However government run agencies and welcoming locals can ease the transition process and better support these families which in turn has the potential to benefit Chimbote at large.

Take Action

[Sign an Online Petition to Stand #WithRefugees](#)

Each day war forces thousands of families to flee their homes. People like you, people like me. To escape the violence, they leave everything behind – everything except their hopes and dreams for a safer future. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency believes all refugees deserve to live in safety. Add your name to the #WithRefugees petition to send a clear message to decision makers that they must act with solidarity and shared responsibility.

We stand together #WithRefugees. Please stand with us. (See the Blog or online edition of Seeds for the link).

The petition asks decision makers to:

- Ensure every refugee child gets an education.
- Ensure every refugee family has somewhere safe to live.
- Ensure every refugee can work or learn new skills to support their families.

The campaign continues until a global compact for refugees is adopted in 2018.

Stop the Better Care Reconciliation Act and Protect Medicaid

By Sr. Ann Scholz, Associate Director of Social Mission for LCWR

As we continue to live out our call to welcome the stranger and extend compassion to refugees fleeing violence and persecution, we also need to ensure we have the right programs in place to help them integrate and thrive. The United States protects the world's most vulnerable refugees. Medical and health care coverage are critical to meeting their basic needs. Medicaid provides many refugees the access to life-saving, affordable health care and coverage to address their medical and mental health needs during their initial resettlement period. A recent report illuminated the lifeline Medicaid extends to refugees and other vulnerable Americans.

We are at a dire time in our struggle to keep quality, affordable health coverage for the most vulnerable men, women, and children in our country. The "Better Care Reconciliation Act" would cause massive harm to our communities, including refugees, and must be rejected. This bill endangers more than 70 million children, disabled people, seniors in nursing homes, and hardworking individuals and families who rely on Medicaid for health care. This means more people could die because they will not have a right to coverage. It is a moral tragedy in the making. Senate leadership is rushing the bill to a vote by June 30th. Today, and the next few days, are our last best chance to stop this immoral bill.

TAKE ACTION TO PROTECT MEDICAID

Call 1-888-738-3058 Now!

Please call twice to reach both of your Senators.

When you call, here's what you might say: *"Hi, my name is [NAME] and I am a constituent from [CITY/TOWN]. As a person of faith, I'm calling to oppose the "Better Care Reconciliation Act". I oppose any efforts to cut or cap Medicaid, and no one should lose coverage as a result of a healthcare replacement bill. Please protect the human dignity of the millions of Americans who would lose coverage. Please oppose the "Better Care Reconciliation Act"."*

Please add your personal story! Lives are on the line, and your calls can make the difference. We need to let all Senators know that people of faith support health care and are against this bill. We need you to call your Senators at 1-888-738-3058 NOW to protect Medicaid and oppose this health plan. By taking action, we pray we can stop this bill and maintain a 50 year old commitment to quality care for our community members. Millions of lives are on the line. Please call your Senators at 1-888-738-3058 to stop this bill. Call twice to reach both Senators, and keep calling until we stop this bill!

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